TAMIL MODERN POETRY

# BHARATHIDASAN AND AFTER

*An Introduction to Tamil Modern Poetry*

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# Foreword

The Tamils have been blessed with a legacy of poetic genius and an ancient tradition of poetry that dates back to pre-Christian days. The rich corpus of Cankam poetry reveals a rare sophistication in style and expression. While many nations in the world were condemned to a life of savagery and silence, Tamils enjoyed civilized rule and stratified customs. The continuity of a creative tradition right up to the end of 20th century reveals much on the aesthetic mind of the Tamils. Kapilar, Elango (adigal), Kamban, Bharathi and Bharathidasan have enriched our language and literature justifying the classical greatness of Tamils, as they are the blossoms of a strong sturdy tree deep rooted in this land.

Creativity is a continuum and it cannot be disbanded suddenly. 20th Century Tamil poetry affirms this fact. Bharathi stood for new values needed for modern life, and Bharathidasan represented the Tamil psyche which got its nourishment in self-esteem, humanism, Tamil glory and the yearnings for a new egalitarian order. The greatness of our poets is felt by Tamils, but it also needs to be introduced to non-Tamil audience. Unfortunately, we have lagged behind states like Bengal, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra and Andhra, in introducing our great art and literature to fellow Indians and others abroad. Hence Bharathi asserted "Knowledge sound and strong needs to be saluted by the foreigners". We have to introduce the great authors of our language to others so that non-Tamils will understand our culture from a right perspective.

I am very happy to learn that Manonmaniam Sundaranar University has embarked on a translation venture, the present one being a book on Modern Tamil Poetry since Bharathidasan. The selections include the two dominant modes of modern poetry - the traditional and the New Poetry. Bharathidasan, Kalaignar Karunanidhi and Kulothungan come in the classical tradition, while poets like Abdul Rahman, Tamilanban, Metha, Meera and Vairamuthu come from the school of New Poetry. I am glad to note that some objective space has been granted to both the schools. Though I feel the omission of poets like Mudiyarasan, Surada and Vezhavendan, I understand the constraints faced by the editors in such a selection. I will not discredit the sincerity of the editors of the present volume which has come out as an acceptable if not full fledged collection of modern poetry and I should also commend efforts of the authors of the essays and the translators who have taken great pains in presenting the poems in English translations.

I wish Manonmaniam Sundaranar University to continue its missions of introducing the treasure houses of Tamils to non-Tamils, and as I congratulate Dr. Aravaanan, Vice-Chancellor for his efforts for promotion of Tamil literature, I also appreciate the work of the editors, authors and translators associated with this project.

**(K. Anbazhagan)**



**MANONMANIAM SUNDARANAR UNIVERSITY**
Thirunelveli - 627 012.

**K.P. ARAVAANAN**
Vice-Chancellor

21.4.2000

# Preface

The present publication has been made possible because of an endowment by the Government of Tamil Nadu instituted in the name of Bharathidasan as early as 23rd March 1995. A grant of one lakh rupees was made for the purpose of research on Bharathidasan. Usually the endowment funds are spent on Symposia and Seminars, but we wanted to spend the fund for the benefit of a larger audience and hence, the endowment was activated with a programme of publication. We had the pleasure of bringing out a book of critical articles in English and Tamil on Bharathidasan under the title *"Bharathidasan - Avarum Avartham Padaippugalum"* authored by acclaimed Bharathidasanists as well as by some budding but competent scholars whose articles were obtained by way of an essay contest on the writings of the poet. We had the proud privilege of having the book released by our ***Hon'ble Chief Minister Dr. M. Karunanidhi*** during his visit to the University on 2nd January 2000.

Also, we enjoy the benefit of continuous encouragement from our ***Hon'ble Minister for Education Dr. K. Anbazhagan*** who obliged us by writing a foreword for the book. He has also granted the same favour for the present publication, too. I take this opportunity to thank our Education Minister for his support and encouragement.

On the occasion of Bharathidasan's Birthday which falls on April 29th 2000, it was decided to issue a book of introduction on Tamil Modern

Poetry which would dwell on the art of Bharathidasan and also on the growth of Tamil Poetry since Bharathidasan. The Editors of the present volume *"Bharathidasan and After"* met many a time on the difficult task of choosing the poets who represent the divergent trends and constitute the dominant voices in Modern Tamil Poetry scenario. The present volume includes the works of poets, scholars and translators who have a first hand knowledge of Modern Tamil Poetry. The authors of various articles have written a critical evaluation of poets, followed by a selection of poems rendered in English. For want of space some poets of significance might have been left out and I was told that some poets did not respond to the call. Any way it is heartening to note that the book includes the major talents of the 20th Century Tamil Poetry, and I am very happy to note that stress has been laid on trend setters, path-makers and representative voices. The major aim of this venture will be achieved, if the present volume engenders similar ventures, and I hope that the translations that appear here will make the non-Tamils reach for either the original texts or full length monographs on the poets.

I would like to place on record my appreciation for the editors of this volume Dr. S. Ravindranathan, Dr. T. Paramasivan and Dr. R. Balachandran, especially Dr. Bala, for their efforts behind this venture and I am sure that the book will find a warm reception among the non-Tamil audience of poetry lovers and scholars on Indian literature.

**K.P. Aravaanan**
Vice-Chancellor

# Editorial

"If a piece of literature is great, it should be admired by International audience" says the great Tamil poet Bharathi. This venture is an attempt to present a few great modern Tamil poets to the international readers in the right perspective. A brief, but critical introduction is given for every poet with a sample of poetry in English Translation. Also Dr. R. Balachandran has written an introductory note on the trends, schools and major practioners.

Modern Tamil Poetry is complex and multi-faceted. It is impossible to present all the poets of importance in a volume like this, and yet a fair representation has been given to the various trends of the modern Tamil poetry. Traditionalists like Bharathidaasan, New poets like Bala and Abdul Rahman, philosophical poets like Na. Pitchamoorthi find a place in this volume.

It is our earnest hope that the non-Tamils in India and abroad will find this volume useful to have a feel of Modern Tamil poetry. I would like to thank the contributors and creative writers for their cooperation. Our special thanks are due to the Bharathidasan Endowment and the university authorities for their fiscal and administrative help and cooperation. But for the untiring help, cooperation and guidance of our Vice-Chancellor Dr. K.P. Aravaanan, this volume could not have been a possibility.

**S. Ravindranathan**
Editor

# Acknowledgements

The publishers wish to acknowledge the all poets and the translators for granting the publishers to use the extracts from their works.

# Contents

# Contemporary Tamil Poetry: Shaping Spirits, Pathfinders and Pathbreakers

*R. Balachandran*

Tamil Poetry has a long history which dates back to pre-Christian age. It begins with the literary texts available as ten long idylls and eight anthologies of subjective and objective poems by various poets including, poets with just a single poem to their credit, along with poets who have written many verses. There are poems short and long; on love and war; on nature and landscape; on different emotions and moods. The ancient Tamil poetry reveals creative excellence, and a rich variety in artistic expression. They have rich images and symbols, and above all they have been written to a well-defined convention laid out in Akam and Puram poetics laid down in the ancient grammar treatise, *Tolkoppiyam.*

Modern Tamil Poetry also reveals the richness and variety that one finds in ancient Sangam Poetry. During the fag-end of nineteenth century Tamil literature was subjected to the major influence of the writings of Manonmaniam Sundaram Pillai, Gobalakrishna Bharathi, Vallalar Ramalingam and Mayuram Vedayanayagam. Ramalingam's poems were humanistic pieces and he campaigned for the removal of poverty. His *Arutpa* verses were written in simple and beautiful common man's idiom. Gobalakrishna Bharathi authored poems on Nandan's redemption. His poetry represented the desire for eradication of caste, and for his versification he tried a musical pattern of verse composed in simple and direct idiom, bordering on oral speech. Sundaram Pillai emerged as the spokesperson of Dravidian ideologies that were to arrive soon, especially in his views on women's equality, Love for Tamil language, and Tamil Pride. Bharathi and Bharathidasan were shaped by these authors.

C. Subramania Bharathi is hailed as the pioneer of Modern Tamil Poetry, for in him, one finds new themes and new techniques, a departure from the traditional school. His poems revealed the public mood of the day, the desire for political freedom, and he used the appropriate idiom in his poetry that suits easy palatability and ready recognition. He composed songs on Hindu gods and deities (though he was for religious harmony), dwelt on philosophical themes (his favourite one being *advaita* stand), and subscribed to Congress ideology (particularly of Tilak school in nationalist politics). Above all his greatness lies in his art that is simple, bold, new, and powerful.

Bharathidasan arrived into the world of Tamil Poetry with a different kind of art and a different programme of politics. He was a rebel in many ways, though in terms of the art of versification, a traditionalist. He was an atheist in politics a Periyarist, in outlook a communist and in his heart of hearts, a hard-core Tamil with a typical Tamil's passion for language and region. He opposed the then child marriage, spoke for free love instead of arranged marriages, denigrated Hindu gods and Hindu concept of castes, and advocated democracy and scientific temper, passionately argued for women's equality and socialist society. The seeds of these ideas were found, according to him, in Bharathi's views, and hence, he chose the pen name *Bharathidasan* rather than writing in his own name, *Subburethinam.*

While Bharathi was shaped by the anti-colonial politics, English education and Indian Renaissance, Bharathidasan concentrated on the evils of age-old shackles, and was orientated to the ideologies of Dravidian parties that stood for regional balance, and communal equality and political liberation of the suppressed classes. He was very much attracted to the ideologues of Tamil Nationalism in which he found the much needed Tamil identity being established by a politics of Tamil pride and self-esteem.

According to the renowned Tamil scholar and poet, Sirpi, the corpus of 20th century Tamil Poetry may be divided into two halves – the Traditional Poetry and New Poetry. The poems written during the first half of the century fall into the first category while the latter half of the century belongs to New Poetry. And yet he accepts that such a classification is rather arbitrary and not viable, for even in Bharathi's Poetry one finds the seeds of New Poetry. Tamil literature enjoys a rich corpus of lyrics, epics and verse dramas, and in Bharathi, we find

lyrical and dramatic poetry. Epic poetry did not come to stay during this century in spite of attempts by many traditional poets like Suddhananda Bharathi and Aranga Srinivasan. Bharathi and Bharathidasan did not attempt to compose epics, but they tried their hands in what may be called short epics, *Kurum Koppiyam.* Bharathi, Bharathidasan, and Kannadasan were grouped as traditionalists for they continued with the traditional poetry forms. The short epics of these poets, like *Panchali Sapatham* (Bharathi), *Puratchi Kavi* and *Pandiyan Parisu* (both by Bharathidasan), *Mankani* and *Attanathi Athimanthi* (Kannadasan) were fine pieces of poetry of traditional school. Namakkal Ramalingam Pillai, S.D.S. Yogi, Thiruloka Sitaram, Tamil Oli, and Sirpi, have also attempted to compose short epics. Since the traditional school of poets gave much importance to rhythmical compositions, many poets like Gopalakrishna Bharathi, Subramania Bharathi and Bharathidasan tried their hands in *Kirthanas,* musical compositions to be sung in performances.

Many poets of the first fifty years of 20th century were able to make their marks as fine versifiers with a good ear for rhythm and rhyme, but they could not make their mark as great poets when compared with Bharathi and Bharathidasan. Bharathi dominated the early decades with his new ideals and nationalist politics and his strong faith in united India has earned him a place in Indian Literature as the first Indian Poet, in the real sense of the term. Bharathidasan dominated the thirties and forties with his fine poems and bold themes and he got his strong supporters and patrons in the members and leaders of Dravidian Movement. Poets of fifties and sixties were either found to come under Bharathi's influence or Bharathidasan's Dravidian movement. Namakkal Kavi Ramalingam Pillai, Thiruloka Sitaram, Suddhananda Bharathi, and Kavimani, and later Kannadasan, were hailed as the poets of the nationalist school for they subscribed to the ideologies of Congress Party. Mudiyarasan, Suradha, Ponnivalavan, and Vezhavendan were inspired by Dravidian ideologies and were attracted towards the art and themes of Bharathidasan. The poetry of these writers had a rare kind of classicism and powerful brand of Tamil Nationalism. When communist parties of India asserted their presence in the field of literature, poetry of the third front arrived in the verses of Pattukottai Kalyanasundaram, K.C.S. Arunachalam, Tamil Oli and Jeeva who attempted to write a kind of public poetry committed Marxist ideologies. When the traditional school of poets got conditioned to stratified writings, predictable themes,

and patterned expressions, naturally the era of experimentation was around the corner. New Poets emerged during the sixties and they continued to dominate the scene ever since.

The poets who wanted to depart from tradition got their influence in C. Subramania Bharathi, and they appreciated the new themes of Bharathidasan. Na. Pitchamoorthy records in one of his forewords, that he was indebted to Bharathi and Walt Whitman, for they were the pioneers in prose poems. Bharathidasan's poems were sought after and published by *Manikodi* writers in their journals, for they found Bharathidasan's style new language powerful, and themes different. Hence, one can agree that the two great masters of modern Tamil Poetry exercised a good influence over the new poets who arrived in the sixties.

It should be recorded that the innovations are ongoing processes in any language, and accordingly, the experimentations were on even when Bharathidasan and his followers were very much in the central scenario of poetry. The pioneers responsible for the New Poetry movement were Na. Pitchamoorthy, C.Su. Chellappa, and Ka.Na. Subramaniam. Pitchamoorthy may be termed as the first urban middle class Tamil New poet and he claimed that he was interest in prose poems and new poetry as a traveller ordained to take up a path-finding exercise. C.Su. Chellappa provided the platform for new writing by floating his little magazine, *'Ezhuthu'*. Ka.Na. Subramaniam emerged as the spokesperson for New Poetry, and it should be mentioned that the credit of giving critical sanction to New poetry and prose poem goes to Ka.Na.Su., C.Su. Chellappa and the university academic, C. Kanakasabapathi. Chellappa published the poems of *Ezhuthu* school under the title, *'New voices'*. When one goes through the volume, it is apparent that the first crop of New Poetry was the product of urban middle class, of elitist and city-made stock. Poets of the group who deserve critical attention for their new themes and expressions were C. Mani, Tharmuh Shivaramuh, Pasuviah, and Vaitheeswaran.

While *Ezhuthu* poets dominated the sixties, the seventies belonged to *Vanambadi* poets and *Kachatathapara* writers. Gnanakoothan, Kalapriya, and Neelamani were the poets who shot into prominence through the pages of *Kachatathapara*. Neelamani made brilliant use of wit and irony; Gnanakoothan wrote with sparkling sarcasm; and Kalapriya was a stylist of impressionistic

perceptions. They also employed bold inhibited sexual figures, and sometimes, simply aimed to shock the audience with their extraordinary perceptions.

Of all the new poets of the seventies, *Vanambadi* poets exercised a popular impact on the poetry audience of the day. When *Vanambadi* magazine was published from the industrial town of Coimbatore, the progressives arrived on the scene. They declared that the poetry of *Ezhuthu* and *Kachatathapara* school were reactionary, and the poets of Dravidian movement did not deliver the goods. They denigrated obscure, obscene, vain and reactionary writings of many new poets, and strongly stood for the values of humanism and socialism. They wrote the popular brand of public poetry, very much like that of Bharathi and Bharathidasan, Sirpi, Puviyarasu and Gnani were the central figures who managed the Vanambadi venture, and those who rallied around them were a galaxy of fine poets – Mu. Metha, Agniputhiran, Tamilnadan, Tamilanban, Meera, Gangaikondan, Chidambaranathan, Bala, Thenarasan, Sakthikanal, and C.R. Ravindran. Also, many other poets who did not subscribe to the leftist ideologies of Vanambadi contributed to the magazine, and among them were Na. Kamarasan, Abdul Rahman, Kalapriya, and Kalyanji. Vanambadis were happy blend of the traditional and the new, and their writings were committed to social transformation, critical of contemporary politics. Their poems, however, did not sacrifice art for the sake of ideas. Hence they commanded respect and attracted wide audience.

During the seventies and eighties, Kannadasan was very much at the centre of the literary realm with his fame as a film lyricist, and Kalaignar Karunanidhi was popular as a fine poetry performer, thanks to his crowd – pulling recitations of poems with good fellow performers like Murugasundaram, Abdul Rahman, Thi.Ku. Natarasan, Ponnivalavan, and others. Suradha, a stylist of Bharathidasan school, and an ardent admirer of traditional poetry, continued to write in magazines floated by him. Kulothungan came up with his classical compositions in his publications. Na. Kamarasan and Meera were popular as brilliant prose poem writers. While Kamarasan's romantic outpourings were arresting, Meera's subtle but pungent satires were superb. After Kannadasan, Metha and Vairamuthu were sought after for composing lyrics for film. Vairamuthu writes with verve and

excitement and is very popular, while Metha's lyrics are sober and classical. New bands of experimenters continue with the *Ezhuthu* tradition and among them are Vikramadityan, Ka.Vai. Palanisamy, Brahmarajan, Ravi Subramaniyan and Mahudiswaran. There are also poets of porgressive school who continue to write committed poetry. Gandharvan and Inquilab deserve mention.

R. Balachandran, one of the editors of this volume is a well known poet, literary critic and translator. His critical introduction to Tamil New Poetry (1981) is reckoned as a classic on the subject. Presently, he teaches in Department of English, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Thirunelveli.

# Bharathidasan
## (1891 - 1964)

S. Ravindranathan

**S. Ravindranathan**

Head, Department of English, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, is a specialist in Comparative Literature and Drama. His articles have been published in various journals, including *The Shavian,* London.

# Bharathidasan

Twentieth Century Tamil Poetry owes its gratitude to two great individuals: Bharathi and Bharathidasan, After Kamban, Tamil Poetry was stagnant for around eight centuries. It was Bharathi who broke this stagnation, as a lone individual. The time in which he was born and the atmosphere were congenial to his success. Bharathi's "Indian Nationalism" added strength to his poetry.

Bharathidasan knew Bharathi personally. But their friendship did not last long since Bharathi died at the age of 39. But Bharathidasan declares the influence of Bharathi on him. During the 1920s, Bharathidasan was much influenced by Bharathi's "Indian Nationalism" and "The Bhakthi Movement" whereas the Bharathidasan of the end of the twentieth century is one of the founders of Tamil Nationalism. Most of Bharathidasan's life time and his poetry were spent on the development of the Tamil Nationalism Movement, while the Indian Nationalism propagated by Thilak, Kokale, Ranade and Vivekananda attracted Bharathi, Vaa Voo Si and Thiru Vee Kaa towards it. The Dravidian Tamil Nationalism founded and propagated by Dr. Nair, Thiagarajan, Nadesa Mudaliar and Periyar (1920 - 1950) attracted most of the Non-Brahmins in Tamil Nadu. Bharathidasan has to be understood from this historical backdrop.

Bharathidasan became an asset to the Dravidian Movement as Bharathi was an asset for the National Movement. Bharathidasan's first collection of poems consists of poems on "Nature", "Love", "Tamil", "Women's World" and "New World". Bharathidasan who enjoyed the beauty of Nature wrote "The Laughter of Beauty". But he did not stop with merely describing Nature as he saw it. He added to it, a humanistic dimension. So, the waves on the sea reminds him of school children. Similarly, the scene of dove's dinner is suggestive of equality, without

disparity. Though he enjoyed the beauty of the villages, the poverty prevalent in the villages shocked him. He did not like the cities, but the facilities available there for women-education gave him confidence about the future. His poetic vision did not stop with enjoying the love of the squirrels or the beauty of the flowers. It widens towards a thought on mankind which makes him bitter towards the human predicament:

*Spoils the food - curbs*
*the budding love - Human race*
*is full of hypocrisy and hatred.*
*Why this state of affairs?*

This appraisal has an echo of Wordsworthian despair:

*If this belief from Heaven be sent*
*If this is Nature's holy plan*
*Have I not reason to lament*
*What man has made of Man?*

Bharathidasan's love of Tamil language is not just emotional, but has a deeper complexity. It has to be understood with a wider perspective. It is his linguistic response to a cultural domination. His plea for pure Tamil has to be understood in the context of his protest against the domination of Hindi:

*Tamil is also known as Manna! That*
*Sweet Tamil is our Life!*
*Tamil is known as Moon - That sweet*
*Tamil is Water that enriches our society!*

Another social menace which disturbed Bharathidasan was the plight of the woman. He feels that enslavement of women is worse than aggression on land:

*Do you deny freedom of speech to women?*
*Do you think you could treat women like dirt?*
*Till suppression of women is eradicated*
*Freedom of the nation is difficult to achieve.*

For Bharathidasan, women is superior to man and it is she who educates him. In "The Showers on Sanjivi Hills", Vanji educates Kuppan. Bharathidasan is emphatic of the fact that a successful housewife has to play many roles at a time and the husband's success largely depends on the talents of his wife. The detailed pen-picture seen in "One Day Incident"

cautions about the fact that a woman, to be successful, should come out of the kitchen.

Though Bharathi spoke for women's rights, he was rather hesitant about widow-remarriage. But Bharathidasan was outspoken in his plea for widow-remarriage. He writes:

*Come on peacock!*
*To purify Tamil*
*To remove the word "Widowhood"*
*To destroy the past tradition!*

Bharathidasan also recommends love-marriage. All this he does, both from a psychological and sociological perspective. He is against arranged marriages, especially those conducted by Brahmin priests:

*Do not accept arranged marriage*
*Conducted by Brahmins*
*You marry somebody*
*Whom you love!*

As a rebel, Bharathidasan goes to the roots of the evil caused in the name of religions. He feels that religion has made man a slave, inculcates only superstitions, which prevent progress. He laughs at religious intolerance condescendingly:

*People quarrel in the name of religion*
*Christ, Mohammed, Siva, Hari and Siddhartha*
*Don't you get involved in this war*
*Though they may try to involve you.*

As an Atheist, Bharathidasan did not believe in temples either. All the same he fights for the rights of all people to enter the temples. His poetic response to the problem is quite interesting :

*You see dirty rats in the temple*
*Still you deny admission for people*
*Like you to enter the temple.*

It is not surprising that the social rebel Periyar attracted the rebellious Bharathidasan. Bharathidasan's anti-Brahmin feeling and anti-caste / religious feeling have to be understood only from this point view. The only leader who was acknowledged by Bharathidasan is Periyar, his mentor. Bharathi was Bharathidasan's guide only as for as poetry is concerned. Bharathidasan's Dravidian backdrop is stronger than Bharathi's backdrop of national movement.

Bharathidasan is essentially a poet of freedom. His is not just a plea for freedom for the Tamils - but for the entire humanity. Ultimately, he is a poet of the humanity, poet of the human freedom :

*Look at the people of this universe*
*Look! how wide spread in the humanity*
*Look at your brothren*
*Be happy at the sea of people*
*Who claim brotherhood with you.*

*Extent your frontier - Make it wide*
*Widen your vision, Make people One.*
*Embrace! Be the recipient*
*Declare that you are the human ocean!*
*No partition! No disparity!*
*Eat only when all eat! Dress as others dress!*
*Hear me, everything belongs to people!*
*Rule the world on Communism.*

Bharathidasan is a poet who sang for the freedom of the humanity.

■ **S. Ravindranathan**

## Wherever you see is only Sakthi

Wherever you see is only Sakthi – Hail brother
The seven seas embody her harmony of colour - there,
See, myriad spheres bursting like balls
From the hands of the Mother – in darkness
Have you seen the seven clouds
Assemble and roar – there
The sound of the chuckling of the damsel – Her
Gentle smile is flashing there!

In the intense desire of a bull-like youth
To drink the juice of poetry to the lees,
The Mother dances moving her shoulders
And he will draw the power of scholars ancient
in the force of the tilting swords – if
incessantly you dream of chopping
the entire world into pieces -- then
The Mother will alight on your very shoulder!

*(Tr. K. Chellappan)*

## Beauty

In the tender rays of the dawn I saw her;
In the expanse of the sea, in the flood of light I saw her;
In the grove, in the flowers, in the sprouts
She made herself visible wherever I touched;
She shines in the ruby lamp
That glimmers in the sky in'the dusk,
In the roads, in the parrots of the branches,
Dame Beauty offered the gift of poetry.

She stood as the light that flames in the eyes of the child;
She smiles in the holy lamp and performs
A dance in the curve of the fingers of the lass
Who weaves a garland of the flowers; behold
She dwells jubilant in the shoulders,
In the majestic walk of the peasant with a plough;
She fastens my eyes on the colourful paddy field
And inspires joy by dwelling in my heart.

Directions and the sky I saw; and
The infinite variety enshrined within;
All that is in motion and still, I saw;
Again I saw Beauty and I found joy

See, She is the pulp behind all that is green
See the virgin unravished by antiquity
Look with love, She is everywhere
If you submit to her charms, sorrow there is none.

***(Tr. K. Chellappan)***

## The Southern Breeze

The Soft Breeze and the Mighty Wind

O Wind, that dances in the vast Empyrean
Which contains millions
and millions of worlds within;
You can break into pieces
the mighty hill as well as
pass gently through the grove
without hurting even the tenderest *Anicham*

The Wealth of the South

Of the width of the wisdom
embodied in your self
Even a little, little speck
Man has not learned yet;
Zephyr, the wealth of the south,
To which land other than this
you have unfolded
The beauty of your bliss?

Southerley's Sweetness

Made cool in Pothikai
Soaked with the cool and sweet sandal
and tasting the fragrance
of the radiant lovely flowers
And acquiring wisdom through listening
To the inspiring melody of the bees
You grow everyday; is there any
Who does not hail thy arrival?

The Fruit of Motion

Your rare shape I can't see; yet
every little movement
Will make me shower with joy
Mothers we have seen
but not mother's love

Yet does not the bond of love
bind the living fraternity?

### The Mischief of Southerley

You blow the flame in the furnace
Your shoulder to the rocklike shoulder
Of the blacksmith melting near the furnace
And your flowery chest against his chest
You bring to embrace tirelessly
And impart coolness joyously
Even if you remove the dress that can't be set aside
You, the damsels, won't set aside

### The Child and the Southerley

You will wave the hair
On the forehead of the flowery face
Of my dear, dear child
as dear as my life
Considering it as the flame of love
You will cool the eye
and flow over its body like liquid
also shake its rattle; Long live!

### The Joy of the Southern Breeze

With a melody that lingers
and a sweet moistness
Wherever you go as a guest
Your were the balm alleviating the summer's heat
An antidote to exhaustion
Then you soar like a kite in the sky
And sing hopping on the tender branches.

### The Service of the Breeze

When I was writing, there
You saw the paper I was writing on
You who came that way
Gave me your gift of joy as usual
"What did you disturb
the paper I was writing on?" I asked
"The dust I removed" said you
and embraced me once again.

### Thanks to Southerley

Mother Pothikai
Who grows the tall coconuts
the areca and the fragrant sandalwood
yielded you, she who yielded
sweet Tamil shall I forget,
That as Tamil gives joy to my soul
You give it to my body,
even while dreaming?

### The Playful Southerley

You flash upon the glassy wings
of the little beetle drunk with joy
Dance on the tiny petals of the little flowers;
and spilling a drip of honey;
and then play along with the child
Playing with the ball outside
You grab the wing garb of the parrots
And pierce it, sweet southerley!

*(Tr. K. Chellappan)*

## We Shall Make a New World

Come, We'll make a new world
    and do away with the warring world;

Come, We'll take the gospel of communism to eight directions
    and preserve it chaste as our life;

Come, We'll wet our hearts
    in the river of love
    and bane 'this is mine'.

Come, We'll burn our indolence
    in the flames of awareness
    and laugh at the men who shout 'this belongs to me'.

Denied of our rightful dues to fruits of nature, let us starve
    Granted, we share it with all.

*(Tr. Bala)*

## Take up Cudgels

How I ask
A few men of power

Put to torture the meek and poor?
Do they think
They rule this world
For ever?
Your mother is anxious,
To rule this earth·
No more delay,
O Tamils,
Awake at once.

Tend the Arts! Take over the industries!
Compose your verses, O Tamils!
Be quick to rise in number
The men in arms to equal the seas;
Pile up in store poison-like military wares;
Till the land, and full harvests reap;
Write books on ethics, and on life-science too
Bringforth true books great in number!

Declare your power in this world by
Moving your Chariot of Sovereignty all over the
Land, sea and sky
Draw your fell sword
O Tiger in the den,
The righteous Tamil!
To put at nought
The deeds the evil wrought.

Perform rightful deeds,
Help towards equal justice!
Beat the drums and declare;
'Wealth is for all, Democracy for all!'
Beat O drums, beat to proclaim;
No more the cry 'No food for us'
No more the complaint, 'we are helpless'.

***(Tr. Bala)***

## Justice for the Heart

In the world full of cunningness and treachery
No suffering there is if one sticks to the path
the righteous show
Is there any doubt? – O my heart
Is there anything wrong in it?

Beyond the market place of caste and religion,
The law of equality will radiate in a rare flame
Listen to it everyday – O my heart
Redeem this earth.

To eradicate the misery of the poor
Who stoop in starvation without even crumbs for all seven days in a week,
Those who speak of the code of living, O my heart
They don't dispel the dreary darkness.

You heard the song of the ploughman
And the crowing of the cock?
Is it not time for the sun to rise from the sea?
Commence your work.

***(Tr. K. Chellappan)***

# Na. Pitchamurthy
## (1900 - 1976)

S. Thothathri

**S. Thothathri**

a retired Professor of English, is a well known Marxian Critic and has authored many books including the one on Jeyakanthan.

# Na. Pitchamurthy

Born in the year 1900, Na. Pitchamurthy had his graduation at Kumbakonam and practised as a lawyer in the same place from 1925 to 1938. Later on he became an executive officer in the Hindu Religious Endowment Board. He passed away in 1976. The personal life of Na. Pitchamurthy was smooth and peaceful. According to him he started writing New Poetry from the year 1934. His first poem was on love. Till the end of his life he never ceased writing poems. In the history of Modern Tamil Literature he has a firm place which cannot be easily erased.

New Poetry in Tamil starts from *Mahakavi* Bharathi. Though Bharathi used various traditional forms in his poetical works, it was he who sowed the seed for writing New Poetry. Because of his preoccupation with political and other literary activities he could not elaborate this genre of modern literature. However it was he who paved the foundation for this form of poetry.

Na. Pitchamurthy, taking the clue given by Bharathi, was the pioneer in beginning a new trend in Tamil Literature. He wrote under several pen names and brought out several collection of poems.

He himself explains in one of his articles the influences over him. He acknowledges whole heartedly his indebtedness to Walt Whitman and *Mahakavi* Bharathi *Leaves of Grass* and Bharathi's prose poems were great sources of inspiration to him. But his manner of writing poems differs from these two great masters of modern poetry.

When Na. Pitchamurthy started in writing poems, Tamil Nadu was seeing the rapid strides that were taking place in the freedom struggle. Aftermath of the first world war brought in its wake misery and poverty to the masses of the world. Tamil Nadu was indirectedly affected by the consequences of the war. Anti-colonial struggle took a new turn under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Native capitalism began to grow in the midst of ruthless completion from foreign countries. There was labour unrest and eventually the organisation of labour under the banner of A.I.T.U.C. took place in the same period. The intensification of contradictions within the capitalistic camp led the out break of the Second World War. Another major event in this period was the dawn of the Soviet Union.

Within Tamil Nadu three major movements shaped the thinking of the intellectuals. The National Movement, the Communist Movement and the Self Respect Movement were certainly influencing forces which penetrated either directly or indirectly with the mind of the creative writers.

When all these social events were taking place a set of writers under the banner of *'Manikkodi'* heralded a new line of creative writing. Though *'Manikkodi'* was nationalistic in its outlook, the creative writers of this camp were of divergent views. Some of them experimented with pure art and had no trace of the above mentioned movements in their writings. They atomised social events and chose microscopic individual occurrences and used them as the embryo of their creative output. They concentrated on form rhythm and minute intricacies of the literary art. Though occasional references to some social events are there in their work, the cardinal aim of their writing is to experiment with form. Na. Pitchamurthy occupies a chief place among them. Some of the major poems of this genius show how he is serious about his craft.

His 'Guide' is an abstract poem. In the first section of the poem the poet describes the miserable position of the old creator. His art is not complete. There are imperfections in his creation. He falls unconscious and wakes up in an imaginary land, Kumarapura. Another craftsman who craves for perfection in his art denounces

his family and goes to forest in search of a guide, a stick. He is after perfection and never commercialises his art. He takes a lot of time in selecting wood for making a stick. The old craftsman makes fun of him and leaves the place. The new craftsman's wife and relatives come to the forest and plead that he must return. The craftsman refuses this offer. He is firm in his convictions. People, young and old die, but the new craftsman has not met death. He is young and art is still young, the secret of which is a riddle. The old craftsman wonders and comes to the new artist. The radiance of the new craftsman puzzles him. He goes back and feels that a new creator, who has conquered time and death has come. He is the new Brahma, the creator. It is art.

This poem purports to bring out the superiority of technique over content, of art over life. The old craftsman, the people of the symbolic place Kumarapura, the wife of the new craftsman and death represent the mundane reality which is transient in nature. The ultimate truth, which is perfect and absolute, is the craft of art. The artist must make his craft perfect and for that he has to wait for ages. This seems to be the theme of the poem. In another poem "Poetry, the Eagle" the same theme is handled but in a different way. Poetry offers variety of themes to the artist. But truth that cannot be forgotten is that though we are bound to earth which is transient it is not the end of the matter. Something superior to it is in the sky. It is rhythm and sound. In all of his poems this tendency to present art as something pure and perfect is to be seen.

Na. Pitchamurthy deflects from the line of poetry followed by his mentor Bharathi. Bharathi is essentially realistic and objective in all of his works. He never mystifies poetry. Even in his experimental ones like 'Prose Poems' he is clear and conveys his ideas directly. But trend initiated by Pitchamurthy is subjective and when he follows it, his poetry becomes mystic and abstract. It becomes completely alienated from social reality. The admirers of Na. Pitchamurthy may say that his is the realistic poetry. But his poems do not suit the canons of realism. He moves far away from social events and enters into the depiction of the inner recesses of human mind.

He is of the view that poetry should stem from the unconscious. In his poems there are passages which indicate the emphasis given to this aspect of literary writing. For example, the poem "The Milk Sea" has a passage in it.

*"Ten O' clock*
*On the table*
*A sixty watt bulb*
*The primitive twine*
*Steps down through*
*the lines.*
*Coming down it*
*Falls into the*
*Milk Sea called content*
*The silent cat practises*
*To see in the fathoms of darkness*
*It tears it*
*The light hidden in the form*
*Peeps out"*

The terms "the primitive twine", "Milk Sea", "fathoms of darkness" in their original refer to the unconscious. The same concept is explained by the poet in his other works 'Calendar', 'The Parrot Cage', 'The Eagle Called Poetry', 'The Guide', etc.

Na. Pitchamurthy prefers to social strife a calm life. Hence he champions loveliness in all of his poems. There is the poem 'The Stork'. It is about a stork which is above and waits for its prey. It has no other thinking but to catch a fish. It doesn't care for the world. The end of the poem expresses a mood of loveliness. "What ever may happen. Is it not enough that beauty is reflected in the tank?" In another poem he describes a lonely branch of a Peepul tree with a single leaf on it.

Just like the new poets of his camp Pitchamurthy also thinks deeply about human existence and death. His poem "Guide" alternates between the imperfect creations and the attempt to make it perfect; mortality and immortality. The old potter stands for imperfection and the new potter is ready to give up anything for

attaining perfection. There is a strain of existentialism in his poems. The poem "The Bag of Aathuran" is an example. The poet points out the fact that life is a burden. In the bag of Aathuran all the oddities and deformities of life are to be seen. We have developed different desires and baseless feelings. The people who live like this are mere shadows.

Pitchamurthy's poems, though they form a class in themselves, are excellent in their artistic creations. Because of his concentration in form, his poems are like exquisitely carved out minute ornamental work in a big tower. He leans towards the fundamental aspects of human life. In doing so he confines himself to certain abstract themes which some times make his poems obscure and mystic.

■ **S. Thothathri**

## The Stork

Near the crystal clear tank
A Stork.
Long red legs
White silky body
with cross hair
And axe like nose
Looking into water.
A beautiful sight.
For this show compulsory fee is there.
Sometimes fish
On several occasions shadow
Life is a tank
Action is art
We also are storks
Sometimes fish is beautiful
On other occasions is shadow beautiful?
What ever it may be
Is it our beauty reflected enough?

## The Parrot Cage

The petals of darkness converged
The stars shone.
The reeds of Kaveri lost sense in the wind.
To the west eternal breathing of the burial gha
In the *yaga* of the Death body becomes ghee.
To the east the endless talk of women
Boundless laughter.
In the sand of Cavery
The noise of the children playing
They said,
"The dusk has come, our parents will scold us
Sprinkle water and heap the sand.
Make the cage and open the door
The parrot will come in.
Its nose red like cherries
Eyes like small beads
Neck with red stripes
Tail like the leaves of Margosa.
Ah! how will it wake up at the dawn!
Let us come by morning and catch it".
Life is Cavery

Everywhere there are parrot cages
I too built one
Word is sand, sound is water
My unsatiable desire is converging fingers.
I made the cage called song
I invited the parrot called beauty...
The door opened in the east at dawn
In the river of light red coloured women
called clouds bathed
Invisible insects chirped happily
The children came, and saw the cage
But not the parrot.
Two children felt sad.

"The parrot had come by night
And finding no place had gone, see the signs".
Several children laughed.
"Fools, there is no parrot and no sign"
I read the song written in the evening,
In the morning, in the shadow of waves can we see image?
Can the parrot enter the sand cage?
Can the desire of mind be shown in words?
Ah! is it enough if there is the call of desire?
Is beauty a fish
To be captured in the angling rod of sound?
Some elderly men sympathised
Oh! friend you do not know *Nannul,* the book of grammar.
What a madness!
Denouncing life and earning Money and true
What is the use of wrestling with words!
You don't know how to live!
What a madness!
Some lesser people praised
You have turned every word into gold
You have made music in the strings
Without touching them.
You have poured beauty into unthinking heart
You have made words the arrow of beauty.
Long live the votary of beauty...
I praised the words of the small men
Eschewed the sympathy of the elders
I shall build the parrot cage all over the river
And invite beauty always...

***(All poems Tr. S. Thothathri)***

# Dr. Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi
## (b. 1924)

K. Chellappan

**Prof. K. Chellappan**

veteran teacher, an expert in both English and Tamil literatures. He has three decades of academic service to his credit. Having served various institutions at various levels, presently he is the Director, State Institute of English, Chennai. He has translated Kalaignar's *Kuraloviam* into English.

# Dr. Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi

What was said of Goldsmith can easily be applied to Dr. Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi. "There was nothing he did not touch and all that he touched, he beautified" Dr. Kalaignar M. Karunanidhi is a rare combination of an eminent statesman and a creative artist of a very high order. Though he is more well known for his prose works and plays and film dialogues with which he powerfully communicated to the people at large, he is also a great poet belonging to the school of Bharathidasan.

As Prof. K. Anbazhagan puts it, "poems have cheated us some times – some poems have degraded us; a few poems have abandoned us – The poems of Kalaignar do not belong to this category". He adds that by singing in poetry that he will bring back the heart of Aringnar Anna which he has borrowed when he rejoins him, he has made the feelings of Anna himself as the deepest springs of his own creativity.

As Kalaignar himself has said, 'I am unable to use the reins of the control of grammar when imagination inflamed by passion flows forcefully as poetic works'. His very early attempts at poetry breathe a passion for Tamil culture but though he went back to the Sangam tradition, he also introduced a new kind of prose poetry with the title, 'These are not poems'. The poem, 'The Sword is here' belonging to this phase has been included in this selection. This can be considered as the earliest of Kalaignar's contribution, to 'New wave poetry' in Tamil.

Whereas *'Kuraloviyam'* also contains a number of poetic pen pictures in prose, his *Sangam Tamil* contains his rendering of a few Sangam songs into modern poetry. In our extract, Kalaignar combines the universal vision of Kaniyan Poonkundran's poem with his euology for his rootedness in his own small village.

Kalaignar has also written quite a few poems on the Akam theme, but as he always sees Akam as inseparable from Puram. We have given an extract which shows this blending of them, Akam and Puram.

Kalaignar's capacity to transform his agony into art is revealed in his elegy on the death of Arignar Anna and hence we have included an extract from that moving poetic monument of Kalaignar to Anna.

Finally, we have chosen an extract from 'Neerpadai' a Kaviarangam poem which reveals his capacity for using rare similes and puns which embody multiple layers of meaning.

In conclusion, Kalaignar's poetry is a hymn to humanism and Tamilism, his passion for creating of a brave new world without divisions which is also a resurrection of ancient Tamil values. But his poetic techniques are as important as his themes: His puns reveal unexpected similarities and his similes reveal new dimensions of reality.

Kalaignar the poet has thus enriched the traditional Tamil Poetry as Kalaignar the Statesman has enriched the Tamil society. As a Statesman, he has converted art into reality whereas as a poet he has converted reality into beautiful art.

Note: His collected poems have been published in one volume with the title, *"Kalaignair Karthaikal"* (1995) by Bharathi Palhippakkam, chennai.

■ **K. Chellappan**

**The Sword is here!**

Only a hut, - on one side spears and swords
Were in row after row flashing like the glittering weapons forged
To win the world
And vanquish fierce foes;
In the cave of the tiger there is no beauty - that is no novelty;
The dwelling place of honour where fear and shivering of body will not show their face;
At the gate of the heroic soldier's house.
With rice in a cup mixed with sugar
Opening her toothless mouth
An old woman with intensely grey hair put a handful of rice
And forcefully sent it off into the stomach
A soldier rushed in and uttered a piece of news
*'You are like a playing girl*
*Are you a man? No hurry?*
*Let there be a gap between breaths*
*Before you speak'*, said that old Tamil Woman
Who was known for her sarcasm.
*"This is no time for your usual sarcasm*
*Give up your usual joke;*
*Perished your son in the battle field"* said he;
Broken-hearted mother raised her head once,
*"When we play dice, we cut the pieces;*
*The battle field is also like war;*
*Is the wound on the chest or the back?*
*"Speak"* said she *"At the back"* said he,
The old woman quivered with pain; her heart burst out;
She took the sword;
Towards the direction where drums were beaten
She sped.
*"I gave my milk to a coward.*
*Can a stupid block who lies fallen flat on the face be called a hero?*
*Once upon a time*
*As if to answer the spear*
*Which flew in front of him*
*My husband showed his chest and fell on the floor.*
*Dead but Immortal.*
*Ah, was he his child?*
*Where is his honour?*
*He has fallen like a dilapidated wall*
*Shame! Shame!*
*Bravery smiles at the peak of the Himalayas.*

*Here in the strings of veena music quivers;*
*That will also proclaim only Honour.*
*Do you belong to the Aryan race devoid of Honour*
*Who drank wine and ate fish*
*You have showered a stain on the heroic Tamil race;*
*I gave my breast's milk, I brought you up as a son*
*Where are the shoulders which had become fat overflowing with heroic pride?*
*Don't you have the itch for battle?*
*O coward who could not answer the spear*
*At last answer my milk of heroism!"*
The poor old woman who had reached the end of the battle field
And turned upward the bodies of the heroic Tamil youth lying in disarray;
The flood of blood was flowing for saving our Tamil land;
She walked amidst the heap of corpses heaving a heavy sigh;
She did not experience that joy even in the wedding bower,
*"There was limit even to the joy at the time of his birth;*
*He was lying dead having shown his chest to the spear.*
*When she saw this, her heart became cool:*
*There is no sorrow at all whatever else I may see hereafter.*
*My son died as a hero, I was about to tear off the breast which fed him with milk;*
*Where is that wretched fellow who uttered a lie to inflame my mind?*
*The sword is here! Where is his tongue?"*

## Every place is our place, Every man our Kinsman

Having heard that the veteran scholar Pandithamani was born
In the Mukavai district before its division into three parts.
When I went joyously to Mahipalanpatti,
I was overwhelmed with joy
When I was told by the great scholar Manickanar.
That was the place which was referred as Poonkunram in *Purananuru* an ancient Tamil text.
Later became Mahipalanpatti.
I went to see a poem which Kaniyan Poonkunran
A poet of that place had engraven in a rock cave on invitation
Whether the world famous poem was engraven by that ancient bard with his own hand
Or it was inscribed by his successors
Whoever has done it, in that song, a Tamilan the days of yore,
Laying bare his heart which was like a vessel full to the brim,
With the clarion-call that

*'Every place is my place, Everyman my Kinsman'*
Piercing the evil with a new beacon light,
he brought about a revolution
Destroying the roots of divisiveness.
Saying 'All the world girdled with the wide sea is our village.
And all humanity is our kinsmen like the eye and the light.'
When we realise that the poet who merging with the flower of Tamil
Brought out the fruit of the universal poem to the entire earth.
Was the poet Kaniyan born in Poonkunram
Our entire body is trembling with joy.
Poets of those days singing rare poems
In the courts of kings who ruled the earth
Used to get huge heaps of gifts like hills
Elephants as well as infantry,
cups of gold in thousands and pieces of land
Even in those days, there were poets
Who like the poets of our day
Would praise the glory of people in prosperity
And when they are in adversity will abandon them immediately
Like the birds leaving the dry tank.

But because Kanian Poonkundran was worried by such people
Did not show even an iota of desire or joy
In decorating the kings and patrons with the ornaments of
poetry in Tamil
When a few suggested - "Compose poems
and go to the kings seeking gifts".
Kaniyan countered their desire with a clever argument
"You sing about the country, - good;
You sing about the rulers of the country, that is also good;
You sing about the heroes of majestic gait carrying the
wounds in the chest
To regain the lost lands as well as acquire new lands, very good;
Because literary works innumerable
Speak of love and the saga of heroic battles
I will choose a unique path and begin to compose poetry
Saying "All the places are our place";
And All men, my Kinsmen,"
When the scholar poet Kaniyankunran composed a poem in
'Nattrinai'
Gave a fine piece of advice to the world
To preserve whatever is useful, saying
Along with the barks of the tree
Which can be used as medicine

Should we uproot the tree itself?
The doctrine of one world
The creed of one community
The Tamil Kaniyan born of the ancient race
Which had emerged
When rock had emerged but not the soil
Established in poetic idiom
Looking at those who blame Fate for every thing
And sit hoplessely putting their hands across the cheeks

The poet of pure Tamil said beautifully,
"The causes of good and evil
Are only our own deeds, not others"
Not only that;
Kaniyan calculating with care said
"The coming of sorrows in quick succession
And their sudden disappearance
These are also due to our deeds"
The living creatures on earth
Dying and disappearing is no novelty at all
To say that life is only for pleasure
and to despise life when there is sorrow
Is no action fit for the lofty minds of men of determination
Like the float moving with running water
The journey of the rare soul (life) will go on in the world
Shaking, gently tossing and with steady poise
Hence continue the rare deeds pointed out by the great men of the past;
Neither bowing before the pomp of power,
Nor ridiculing those who are called low
Like this the unity of the world, the principle of one creed
The nature of life / the lofty deeds
Considering joy and suffering with equanimity.
Not surrendering before those eminent by wealthy
In the garland of poetry
Woven with many such flowers of lofty thoughts
We find a great heart throbbing.
Let this idea spread on earth like the fresh flood
Even the poet who spoke of the lofty idea
That all places should merge into one world and
The human race should become one in loving bond.
Without forgetting his own place annexed it to his name
If we think carefully about the fact
That even the poet lived with the name Kaniyan Poonkunran

Is it not true that even the great man was not free from attatchment to his soil?

## Creations of Akam Turai

Literature was divided into Akam (creations of the inner world, noumenal) and Puram (creations of the outer world, Phenomenal) by the Tamils of antiquity.

'Here and hereafter' – is neither Tamil nor belongs to Tamils;
Akam - Puram is alone Tamil;
Is there any literature equal to the ability of Tamils who wrote classiying 'tinai'
Beginning with 'Kaikkilai' (one sided love) upto 'peruntinai' (inappropriate love)
Seven Tinai's there are ......
*Tolkappiyam* of unending fame says so.
Which is greater Akam or Puram?
I argued oneday with Anbazhagan
'Anna', the scholarly Anna intervened and clarified: "Brother,
Puram is what can be shared;
What should not be shared is Akam, brother".
That explanation of Anna is the illumination for the Akam theme.
Because the Pandavas and Panchali did not know,
The cultured tradition of Akam Tinai,
The Akam tinai was shared by five people.
That was the fault of their tradition;
And to call that 'culture' is the fault
Of those devoid of rational thinking.
Even though Akam and Puram are divided into two
See they always happen together, not separated by even the space of a tiny grain.
The hero will come with the wound pierced by the spear.
The heroine will offer balm with spearlike eyes.
Even when the lovers lie interturned (united) as the fish in the pond,
They will rush to the bank if there is a call from the battlefield.
Even if they enjoyed the bliss of love enfolding eye within the eye.
The race of the heroes will rise up if there is any danger to their dear soil.

(From the Presidenal poetic address, Poets Symposium,
Madras Medical College, 13.7.1974)

## Lend thy Heart, Anna!

Wiping the tears off the weeping eyes
Valluvan of the ambrosial words asked:
"Mother, where shall I be born?'

Kissing the son of the worshipping son
And embracing him with hands like the aerial banyan root
The heart thumping in joy
Like the agriculturist who will be joyous
that the soil he has ploughed will not become dry without the seedling to be transplanted
'O sugarcandy, the honey jelly, *Tirukkural!*
Like pouring rice gruel to the empty stomach
Be born in Kanchi', She said,
He was born – as our beloved brother
As the King of the empire of knowledge;
Like the soft breeze of Pothikai hills,
Like the fresh fragrance of the blossom of passion for Tamil.
Like the content of a song of praise.
Like the heroic song of the ancient Tamil land,
Our Anna! rose
Like the sun rising in the Eastern sky.

To sing his glory
The brother brought up by him
Came here with his own gift, Tamil
This only is truth
'The leader', some say, 'the eminent philosopher' some say;
'An actor' some say, 'the king of dramatic art', some say
'The embodiment the power of speech and capacity for delicious writing', some say
'A Mari', some say 'A Jewel' others say
The Minister of the State' some say
'Mother', some call him, 'the protector of the Mother tongue' others say;
'The Statesman', some say to enable
Those who have no time to call him
With these several names
To call him with one word out of heart's love
His mother gave him the name of Anna
To honour that race of mothers,
A statue for Avvaiyar
A statue for Kannaki who nourished the path of virtue,
A statue for Bharathi with an unbending heart,
A statue for Bharathidasan with a head which will not bow to any
A statue for Veerama Munivar,
A statue each for Caldwell and Pope
A statue for Kambar
A statue for the Tamilian who floated a ship

A statue for Thiruvalluvar who speaks Kural in all directions,'
To make the world know his passion for Tamil
With which he erected ten statues.
When we erected a statue for our elder brother
He stood pointing with his fore finger
We thought that it was a sign of his command
Alas, only today we realise that
He meant that he would live for one more year only.

Our brother – the king ruling our hearts;
Did you not say that there is a younger brother
Who will not fear the army of the foes,
Why did you undertake the long journey leaving us?
We grew up in the warmth of the light of your eye's radiance;
Why did you convert our eye into a tank?
Shade for us, we thought you were; but you
Have gone to the depths of the sea, seeking shelter, is it fair?
Are you slumbering in the sea shore
Proclaiming 'I am the pure pearl, and all the other pearls only false ones'
Why did you curl the tongue inside, which poured music?
you did wonders in the world of letters
By moving your fingers;
Why did you fold that finger?
I have seen the great beauty of your thinking with closed eyes;
But why is this torture by which the earth has concealed you
from our sight?
You tolled the death knell for cruelties
But why did you subject us to this cruelty?
We should have a heart that will endure any calamity, you used to say;
But we have no heart to bear this calamity;
You have enjoyed enough of the sea breeze
Rise up and come, our brother:
You will not come, you will not come;
Anna, we know the conspiracy of nature.
Until I come to the place seeking where you are
Please lend your heart to me, Anna;
When I come I will bring it holding it close to my heart
And I will place it on the wreath of your feet.

**The Family of Water**

In a place where there is water, there is compassion
Here on the. banks of the Cauvery there is compassion;
And generosity and living with glory.
On the topic of the water family,

The bards of lofty fame are singing poetry,
Saying, 'Are you not kinsman of this family?'
Catching me who composes poetry with words like bubbles
Placed me amidst poets of peerless words
And asked me to compose poetry of 'water',
The writing of the sky is rain;
When it is 'written' on the soil it takes the shape of the river,
When the river becomes a tank
The curved letter becomes a straight 'letter'.
The Alpha (root word) for all these works is the sea.
People would ask who wrote on our heads and shed tears,
Those who say, 'See I will change all that is pre written'
Will win the fate with the war ring words of sweat and labour.
If we describe that the thunder is the cough
Of the old man called the sky
And the lightning is the flash of his withering eye
The rain is the saliva which he pours from his mouth
We will not agree to welcome the 'sickness' of rain
Let me say a simile congenial to youth:
The roaring of thunder is the confluence of the voices of the lasses (of stars) in the Galaxy
The flash from their sword like eyes is the lightning
The drops of rain are the fragrant rose water showered on the round moon like lover,
If a simile congenial to heroes is needed,
The clashing of the chests of the lofty faces is the flash of lightning;
The red blood shed by many a hero in the battlefield is rain
Whether it is the field of war or the bower of love
Or the breeding ground of evil diseases
In general the sky is the battle field;
The goodly agriculturist calls the sky which pours rain
As "Honour" in the colloquial idiom,
Is it not appropriate?

* The Tamil word 'Manam' means both sky and honour.

*(All poems Tr. K. Chellappan)*

# Kannadasan
## (1927 - 1981)

P.K. Kalyani

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# Kannadasan

Poet Laureate Kannadasan is a 'living' poet. He has written lyrics, long poems, prose and film scripts. He reigned the film world for nearly two decades between 50s and 70s with his lyrics that number above 2000. Even today his lyrics are broadcast over the Tamil radio and Tamil channels of the television.

Among the modern poets in Tamil, Kannadasan enjoys a place along with the great poets like Bharathi and Bharathidasan. It could be observed that all the three poets had been drawing their raw materials from life as well as from the great epics and folk literature. While Bharathi had a specific vision which was the freedom of the country and Bharathidasan had a specific vision which was the Dravidian land, Kannadasan had no such specific major visions to make an edifice of his poetry.

Kannadasan was introduced to the literary world as the poetic voice of the DMK Party. He was greatly influenced by C.N. Annadurai of the party. His early poetry bears the stamp of the party's ideologies. After being in the party for a decade he joined the Indian National Congress. The poems he wrote during the period have the flavour of the ideologies of the Congress Party. His poetic life, influenced by various ideologies was initiated by atheistic ideas. It ended with its foundation firmly set on theistic principles. His early poems which bordered on parochialism matured to contain the encompassing, nationalistic ideologies. These changing stands of the poet made some critics to conclude that he is a poet of self contradiction. But, looking at the matter differently, one would say that he had been on an eternal quest – searching for the ultimate In such a search the apparent contradiction is only inevitable. It is this quest and related contradiction that made Kannadasan a great poet, because it implies animation, the very essence of life. He had been exposed to a

life rich in experiences. His dynamic mind had ploughed through these experiences to arrive at certain ideologies.

Kannadasan's experiences are of immense variety and this variety had determined the variety in his poetic subjects as well. He has written on love, the despondency that engulfs the lovers, the separation of the lovers and the resulting pain that gnaws them, other relationships in life like sister - brother relationship, parental relationship and filial relationship, chivalry, politics, society, different social hierarchies, philosophy – the list could be endless. The ultimate subject however is the permanent in the impermanent, the uncontaminated in the contaminated world. The subjects are indeed subjective in the sense that the experiences are personal. Yet they are the basic experiences every individual encounters in his day to day life. As a result, one can emphatically say that in a common man's life there is not a single day in which he does not listen to and hum the songs of Kannadasan.

It has been often said that Kannadasan is more heard and sung than read and studied. But then, aren't great literatures sung / narrated around the fire? Kannadasan's lyrics are akin to the early ballads and lyrics which may not be bombastic and high sounding but is full of simple emotions and values - and above all, are loved even today. A ballad singer identifies himself with the persona, as the ballad tells something that is very much related to his or her own life. Kannadasan went back to the childhood and traced his development and struck the cord of resonance in every individual which made him a great poet.

Kannadasan was greatly sensitive to the life around him and the divisions and discords in it. In many a lyric Kannadasan reacted specifically to the chasm between the haves and have nots. He was sensitive to the social divisions that ate into the lives of people denying opportunity to one section and thrusting the same on another section. In his vehemence to fight this evil out he was no less passionate than Bharathi. The feeling for the deprived, which is very strong in Bharathi is found in the words,

*If even one person is without food,*
*Let us destroy the entire world*

gets echoed in Kannadasan's words:

*All should get everything*
*If not this land should be destroyed*

The same emotion surges forth in yet another lyric also:

*The bulging wealth, when it bulges further is dangerous*
*The yearning heart, when it yearns further is dangerous*

Kannadasan is out and out a Tamil, but devoid of the blind fanaticism that is found in the pseudo Tamils who only make language a matter of politics just for their personal survival. Though an ardent lover of the language and the culture, he could still accommodate the other linguistic and cultural space. He envisioned an India where there will not be any division between the Northerners and the Southerners. The bone and marrow of all Indians irrespective of the area to which they belong is the same, says Kannadasan in his *Kavitanjali.* The boundaries of the regionalism that is found in his poems merge with the national boundaries. He considered variety as the different manifestations of the single. The regionalism that is portrayed in *Kavitanjali* does not damage nationalism; instead, enriches it.

Another charge that is levelled against Kannadasan is that his poems do not mix experience; and that they are mere verbal art. The answer to this charge may be found in the fact that Kannadasan remains a great poet even today. His place has become permanent and his lyrics are placed high above the so many that have been written after his time. This precisely is because he strums the cords of the hearts irrespective of time and socio cultural divisions. His poems carry the felt emotions of the poet which evoke similar emotions in the reader.

Life has been the greatest source of nourishment for Kannadasan's poems. He supplements it with subjects drawn from ancient Tamil classics and folk literatures. The influence of Sangam poetry especially *Kalithogai, Tirukkural, Nalavenpa,* and *Nattrinai* is predominant in his poems. Though the influence of the ancient classical Tamil poetry is a pervasive one the six poems that appear under the heading *Pazhampadal Pudukkavithai* needs a special mention. However, the influence of Tamil classical poetry does not usurp his poems of their uniqueness. He is known for not only making anew the poetic influence on him but also for transgressing the traditional poetics. A case in point is his poem *Vetri Murasu*. When the flood gates of his emotions are let open, his poems gush out wafting along with them the aroma of the old and the new literatures with a new grammar. This violation indeed is no impediment to satisfying the literary taste of millions of his readers. In this context it may also be mentioned that Kannadasan was rated by his readers as an epic poet for his poetic pieces namely *Thaippavai, Maangani,* and

*Aattanathi Aadimanthi.* Kannadasan was influenced by folk literature also. In his *Paattin Kural* he makes a mention of his thoroughness with folk songs, Siddhar literature and spiritual literature. His lullabies draw their inspiration from the folk lullabies.

Kannadasan was a born poet with a very fertile imagination. When poetry was the domain of the elite few, he took poetry to the common man. He may not have left behind a great epic but he set a whole new tradition and in that he is a "Kaviarasu". He is a poet who revelled in creation. In a couple of lyrics he has equalled himself to the immortal:

*In the world I am a respected god*
*Greater than gold is my wealth*

and

*Since I create, my name is god*
*In no stage do I meet death*

Looking at the fertility of his imagination, the prolificity of his writing, and the literary appeal his lyrics have, one is reminded of Shakespeare's Cleopatra.

*Age cannot wither (him) nor custom stale*
*(His) infinite variety*

■ **P.K. Kalyani**

**1.**

The eyes that does not see you are not eyes;
The heart that does not think of you is not a heart;
The words that are not spoken by you are not words;
Without you, I too am not myself.

Now, you are one half, and I am the other;
If either of us separate, the other half is pain.
Times would change, scenes would change;
But before love you and I are not different.

With love I clasped you in my arms –
As I would a child.
Whether you would give or I would give –
Who ever would give, you and I are not different.

Without a god, there is no temple;
Without a temple, there is no lamp;
You are my god; I am that lamp;
Before god, you and I are not different.

**2.**

Where is peace? where is peace?
I want a place there;
Where there is no man
I want a place.

When my fingures strum,
The Veena moans;
When my hands embrace,
The flowers too scorch.

With what intention
Did you create me, O God?
The God who created the eyes
And created woman, is cruel!

Like a familiar bird, one flew towards me;
The new bird flew away,
forgetting my heart.

If you make me sleep for a while
I would prostrate before you, mother;
If you give me peace, today alone,
I would sleep, O mother!

## 3.

The good among the hearts do not sleep -
This is the truth the great codified - Karna
Encounter that which comes!

You are not son to mother;
Not elder brother to the younger;
You bore the public stander - I too
Shared your disgrace!

Kannan who shoulders
The duty of the king
Would humble himself before you - Karna
Forgive and be gracious!

As obligation for support,
You chose to be in the wrong front,
Fell in the trap - Karna
Kannan is the imposter!

## 4.

Did god create the world - or
The world create the god? - when
For milk and porridge
The poor are distressed
Are the numerous temples necessary? - Are
The garlands and ceremonies required?

Births and deaths are his domain;
Whose domain are laughter and tears?

Night is here;
Light is there.
What job
Is god's?

Drops of sweat of this man
Are the pearls which that man wears!
The toil of this poor
Is the value of that bungalow!

Eagle is there;
Birds are here.
Between the two,
Where is god?

Is that the temple bell
Or the sound of my desire?
Is that the voice of his prayer
Or the answer to my question?

Hunger is here;
Food is there.
Between the two,
Where is god?

If one takes a path,
He may return by the other -
This is the rule of the road.
But what is justice to the poor?

The path is there;
The journey is here.
Between the two
Where is god?

**5.**

Madras, wonderful Madras - O boy!
Madras, wonderful Madras!

There is no one who goes at leisure - here
There is no one to speak good Tamil!
There seem to be no difference
Between man and woman,
Great injustice, god!

Like a pack of cards - here
Houses have been built;
Though houses have been built - some
Sleep on the platform.

On the roads of the city - for
People to stand there is no shade;
There is no wide, open space - there is
No place to dry the paddy - O boy!

When did the cow yield
Calfs of straw?
What? When put under the arm
It doesn't cry!
There is no value for money; here
There is no respect for values!

For the ruin of the city
Moore market is the token;
For the ruin of the country
The culture of Madras is the token!

You who go by luxury cars
In arrogance, – If
Our tilling stops, what would happen
To your car rides? – What would happen?

You ruined men,
Did you come to the city to flourish?

*(All poems **Tr. P.K. Kalyani**)*

# Kulothungan
## (b. 1929)

Prema Nandakumar

**Prema Nandakumar**

is a well known author and translator. She is a freelance writer and author of many books. She lives in Srirangam, Trichy.

# Kulothungan

Kulothungan has been writing verse from his school days. It is certainly no esay task to have persevered in the vocation for more than half a century. The poet has been true to his own self and none of the 'isms' or 'movements' of his time has been able to weaken his scientific outlook. Considering a career span of fifty years, he has not written an overwhelming number of poems. This is partially due to his other commitments as a technologist, educationist and administrator, for Kulothungan is also Dr. V.C. Kulandaiswamy. Again, Kulothungan is by nature self-restrained, and even when putting on the wings of poesy, he prefers to be closer to earth than the sky beyond. He wants to serve man first and hence earth is his base.

The Tamil language has been the proud possessor of a living literature with a history documenting more than two millennia of creative writing. Naturally, in this long span of time when there were moments of soul-warming lyricism and heights of epic recordation, there were also times when the springs of true Tamil poesy seem to have run dry. One such period was the nineteenth century that immediately followed the Puranic Age. The aridity was no doubt due to the turn towards English education because of the British rule. Unfortunately, Indians began to ape the west in everything British and almost wholly jettisoned their own peerless tradition. Tamil poetry suffered as a consequence. The little that survived was curled up as religious poetry in saintly souls like Ramalinga Adikal. The rest was a desire to enjoy the externalities of life in a state of self-indulgence nodding appreciatively to poems like the decadent *Kulappa Naicken Kathal* or come up with baser imitations.

The opening years of this century brought good news to Tamil poesy. Subramania Bharathi's advent sent an electric enthusiasm all over the land. Here was meaningful verse which was also noble in intention and

diction. This was poetry that could be understood by the common man. As for as Tamil Nadu was concerned, Bharathi performed a delicate balancing act on firm, golden wires. On one hand his patriotic poems passionately called for an integral India. He could never see India as a building-bloc nation. This was Mother India, a single image of incalculable strength and power. On the other hand, Bharathi also called upon Tamilians to be proud of their heritage as *Tamils*. There was no self-contradiction here but a double-vision that was yet integral.

Indeed, Bharathi gave back the Tamilian his poetic voice, an unadorned, direct, pointed voice of sanity. There was passion but it was not unbridled violence. He zoomed beyond petty considerations as caste, class or religion. He was a humanist poet to the core and would never offend anyone on the basis of his caste or denomination. If he did occasionally use strong words to give vent to his exasperation, they were always directed against his own community, for he knew the value of self-criticism.

It was a tragedy for the Tamil muse that Bharathi died early. Kulothungan who has analysed the scientific elements in Bharathi's poetry says that here was a poet who had intense belief in Indian culture but was ready to welcome changes based on lessons from the same culture. Blind faith in the past was alien to Bharathi as was self-defeating emotionalism. This is why Kulothungan took Bharathi as his role-model in writing poetry. Though during the last eighty years hundreds of Tamil poets have appeared in print, Kulothungan alone remains the one poet who has sought to preach as Bharathi did and practice what he has been preaching. Avoiding violent diction, verbal rancour and crowd-pulling Jiongoism, Kulothungan has been able to gaining a reputation that he has kept the vision of Bharathi intact in speaking of the greatness of Tamil language and working for it, the need for a scientific outlook, the importance of maintaining ethical standards to assure a dependable and unpolluted moral fabric for our society and a universal outlook.

Born at Vangalampalayam on 14th July, 1929, Kulothungan had his education in Karur and completed his doctoral dissertation in the University of Illinois. He has scaled enviable heights in the field of hydrology, and has been an educationist of high repute. In fact, it is surprising that he has remained faithful to his early enthusiasm for writing poetry in Tamil, since the temptations of the outside world have been many. Perhaps the very tensions of everyday life and the draining of one's intellectual stamina

in administrative posts have forced Kulothungan to seek refuge in poetry as if quaffing a draught of renewal to help him work for human excellence.

One of the early poems of Kulothungan published in the magazine *Tamarai* (August, 1969) caught the attention of the eminent critic, Dr. K. Kailasapathy. Dr. Kailasapathy wrote about it enthusiastically in Kavithai Nayam (1970):

> "Here there is no noisy confrontation or emotionalism; no self-pity of tears and sentimentality; nor hair-brained irony; nor a feeling of helplessness when the mind grows numb with fear; there is none of passionate extremism. Yet the poem has a magnetic attraction. A few ideas on human excellence arrived at after staid thinking are conveyed through choice words full of intellectual vitality. This is what is special about this poem. The poet has not given much space for emotion in this poem. It is the intellect which is in the driving seat. Emotions are in the background, but almost inaudiable. And yet the poem has a creative mood. It is all due to the able handling of a rich language".

Exactly forty years have gone by and today I find that there is no need to change a single word in Dr. Kailasapathy's note. It is a measure of his greatness as a perceptive critic that he had rightly gauged Kulothungan by his very first poems. At the same time, it is heartening to note that Kulothungan also has never faltered in his steps and has proved Dr. Kailasapathy's judgement right on every count.

Kulothungan is not a prolific poet. During these forty years he has published only six slender volumes. He has avoided the long poem. Perhaps his engagement in other branches has given him no time for a sustained adventure with an epic or even an epyllion. Or, being a scientist by training who sees that in this technological age where 'speed' is the mantra for everyone, there would be no takers for a long narrative poem. All his poems are of moderate length, averaging around thirty lines. He does not have much use for nostalgia about the bygone glory of the race. His eyes are firmly critical of the present and repeatedly turn towards the future, underlining the tremendous possibilities that are yet to be realised. There is spontaneous expression both in the structuring of the poem and setting up the internal logic, and a natural turn for poetic rhythm and a poetically sensitive diction. Often this makes for an archaic turn of phrase, but also gives a distinctness of style. Hence this too is welcome. For the rest, Kulothungan's poems grip our attention because of the message. As Dr. U.R. Ananthamooorthy says:

"What characterises the poetry of Prof. Kulandai Swamy is its ethical imagination. It persuades, but it doesn't declaim. It is meditative, but not rhetorical. Its linguistic structure is not elusively suggestive; but it is made up of perfect statements. Yet these statements are not abstract philosophy but poetry because what the poet says becomes memorable speech".

The past; the present; the future. A poet comprehends all the three 'times' though he transcends them even when remaining imprisoned in time. Fortunately for Kulothungan, he rejects self-imprisonment in sloganeering. There is the tremendous Tamil heritage: literature, history, culture. He does not reject them; at the same time, he is not interested in singing poems to the past while remaining imprisoned in the ills of the present: a desecrated literature, a history shorn of ideals, a culture that is being vandalised.

Kulothungan had come under the influence of E.V. Ramaswami Naicker whose Self-Respect Movement had indeed achieved a transformtion of the Tamil social fabric at many levels. The Movement had called for rejection of caste, religion, and other man-made divisions. For the sensitive student, the caste-based tyranny had an existential revulsion. There were so many castes and each so-called lower caste still held yet another group as lower than itself! Periar Ramaswami's direct action gave pulsating life to Subramania Bharathi's fulminations against caste-born arrogance.

There was then the ubiquitous presence of religions. No doubt religion had helped in strengthening the moral fibre of the societal man, but it has also fawned the communal divide between man and man. In any case what is the use of religion for a man whose stomach is empty? And if man can move forward on his own to achieve human excellence, why spend one's time in vain disputations about the existence of God? One of the early poems of Kulothungan captures the mood very well:

*"For the mind, engrossed in the mission on hand*
*Earth itself is Paradise enough:*
*No Heaven can match that bliss.*
*Immortality, I will strive and seek; but*
*Freedom from rebirth, I shall never ever ask:*
*There is infinite joy in the wonders of the world,*
*I sing in praise of the kingdom of man.*
*My heart is lost in the dreams of the earth:*

*Should salvation come to me on a platter,*
*And abundance and bliss unfold;*
*Should the gates of Heaven open apart,*
*I shall still be lost in the dreams of the earth".*

***(Tr. Kulothungan)***

But inspirational icons are welcome, especially from history, for these are ever the flaming pioneers who heraled human Excellence:

*"How immense our efforts have been:*
*The one who took hemlock,*
*Those that were burnt alive,*
*The one who parted his loving wife*
*and tender child to go to the forest*
*and undertake severe penance,*
*Those who ended languishing in prison,*
*The one who bore and suffered on the Cross..."*

***(Tr. Kulothungan)***

There is but one message from Kulothungan to humanity, the Upanishadic message pronounced by Swami Vivekananda. Stop not till the goal is reached! And what is this goal? Liberty, equality and fraternity for all mankind, the call of the French Revolution that inaugurated a new matrix of time for the world. Thus, the goal is not a mythic Heaven or soul-ravishing utopia but the immortal state of universal harmony and fulfilment. According to Kulothungan this is what Bharathi meant when he referred to the state of immortality:

*"The immortal state is the horizon of human growth which is near and yet far all the time. The Puranas say that the immortals have been enjoying this plane of higher life. Bharathi insinuates that we too should reach the plane to prove that the gods are our equals and not a race superior to us. Indeed, he feels that we have reached the state."*

***(Tr. Prema Nanadakumar)***

Such idealism has been the backbone of Kulothungan's poetry all these years. At the same time, it is not as if he has been mesmerized into intellectual amnesia by the Movement of Periar Ramaswami. Periar Ramaswami himself did not want a following which had abdicated thought. Such disciples allways spell the death of the very existence of the ideals

of any movement. While Kulothungan has been reiterating the need for a scientific temper and for moving forward boldly in the technological age, he has also been watching the manner in which the Movement of Periar Ramaswami has been demoralised. How can the Tamilan hold up his head high when he has replaced one set of obscurantism with another and has almost totally rejected the Movement's sterling call for destroying caste-barriers? Some of the powerful poems of Kulothungan are not only against the caste system but against those who have only worsened the situation by paying lip-service to the ideals of Periar Ramaswami:

*"Have you watched the manner*
*In which caste is being denied?*
*Though we welcome the removal of caste*
*From street names,*

*How come several institutions*
*That are serving the cause*
*Of higher education"*
*Emblazon the names of caste?*

*We brought to being*
*Educational institutions*
*As an army to defeat*
*The forces of inequality;*

*How can we accept the same colleges*
*Work on the principles of caste?*
*What a shame? Are reforms*
*Meant to poison the fields*
*Where the seedlings grow?*

*The parties that virtuously bow*
*To the hegemony of caste*
*And are time-servers*
*To this degrading phenomenon*

*Shout from the platforms:*
*'Down with the caste system*
*That has grown as the mighty banyan!'*
*Must the world endure still*
*This cacophonic, double-talk drama?"*

**(Tr. Prema Nandakumar)**

The poet seems to feel that the rot set in when an idealistic social movement was heartlessly gobbled up by political aspirations. Numerous poems from Kulothungan's pen have rained fire and brimstone on the political culture which desecrates almost everything idealistic under the sun. In the remarkable poem, "Jewels Turn Into Leeches", the poet's anguish is a physical pain, a psychic nightmare:

*"The medicine has become*
*worse than the malady;*
*Those whom we accepted as jewels*
*Have turned to be leeches...*

*Ungrateful towards those*
*Who so completely pinned their faith in them,*
*They exploit the poor, proclaiming*
*'We'l establish a world*
*better than the heavens above!*
*There shall be no poverty.*
*Mother Tamil will be enthroned.*
*We shall regain the merit and glory*
*Of the Sangam age of the past!'*
*Such double-thinkers*
*Have set up shops now."*

***(Tr. Prema Nandakumar)***

There are other problems that the poet is confronted with in this world of human affairs. The divide between the rich and the poor is widening and the rich are grown insensitive while the poor are full of apathy. This state of unthinking sense of defeat in the poor becomes a rich mine for political exploiters who need the crowd as vote-banks. Yet another tragedy of our times is that inspite of all that has been said since Subramania Bharathi, the state of women leaves one depressed. Expressing his deep displeasure at writers and artistes turning women into a marketing commodity ("Traders in Flesh"), Kulothungan has been writing like Subramania Bharathi who has passionately called for equal status to women:

*"Remember, it is womanhood*
*That has been the theme ever;*
*The subject of epic creations;*
*The origin for all arts;*
*The power that quickens the life within.*

....................

*Though womanhood is the spring of love*
*It is not simply for flesh-enjoyment;*
*On this earth, womanhood is love;*
*Power; aspiration that rises*
*To heights; the very essence*
*Of all creation."*

***(Tr. Prema Nandakumar)***

In a striking poem, 'The Lord's Feminism', Kulothungan has a charming, meaningful conceit:

*"Lord Shiva the rationalist*
*gained immense strength*
*By giving half of his body*
*To the damsel; Can poets*
*And scholars do better to describe*
*The greatness of women?"*

***(Tr. Prema Nandakumar)***

Another tragedy of our times that has continued to pain him is the state of the Tamil-speaking citizens of Sri Lanka. But the poet is not an all-time recorder of tears and anger. Much of Kulothungan's poetry deals with practical advice and a call for right action. His words carry conviction because he has himself been going through a punishing schedule and has avoided mere platform oratory. He is all for a prime status for Tamil and wants it to be accepted as a classical language. At the same time, Tamil should not be allowed to fossilize as punditry sought to do in the 17th and 18th centuries. The new life that has been granted to Tamil by Bharathi and other great writers of this century must be made to glow with purposeful extension by improving scientific diction and publishing scientific treatises in Tamil. He extends a grateful welcome to those who are ready to work for a eradication of social evils like poverty, illiteracy and obscurantism:

*"Welcome to those who quiver to see hunger,*
*Produce wealth and joyously share;*
*Welcome to those who dare and declare:*
*'A sorrowless and painless life*
*is realisable here and now'.*

*I have nothing to ask of those*
*Who love ease and indolence;*

*Welcome to those who seek a new world*
*And opt for a life of sweat and toil."*

***(Tr. Kulothungan)***

How can man speak of poverty when the entire world full of tremendous possibilities is very much within his grasp as a field to be tilled? Nature's bounty has no parameters! It will yield all that man wants provided he is prepared to share the prosperity properly with his fellowmen:

*"It is the river of social justice*
*That assures a rich growth on the field*
*Where is streams; it is*
*A nectarean spring; human resources*
*Make up the farming that assures*
*A rich harvest;*

*There are fields in this society;*
*Woods; gardens; forests;*
*Oceans; assured results.*
*If we tend with proper care,,*
*The entire earth would be*
*A rich field; there will be*
*No desert."*

***(Tr. Prema Nandakumar)***

Is Kulothungan a poet of social criticism and no more? Well, he has written some deeply emotional lyrics as well. Subdued emotions, crystallised after long periods of hibernation have given an occasional poem that stops us in our tracks by their platonic content. These poems that reveal a gentle, comforting island of peace are themselves an indication that the poet Kulothungan is essentially a 'loner'. His latest collection, Anaiyaa Dheepam proclaims the loneliness of a heart grown forlorn:

*"People everywhere; as if*
*even the falling sesame has no space.*
*I stood there, but my lone companion*
*Was loneliness...*

*There is the emerald field;*
*But I see a desert there;*
*The All-Gods may be in my front,*
*But I see only empty space.*

*Heights to be achieved beyond;*
*A desire shoots forth in me;*
*It loneliness the space*
*Where one comes face to face*
*With the highest peak?"*

***(Tr. Prema Nandakumar)***

One can understand the note of weariness if the entire poetry of Kulothungan is taken in by a single glance. Fifty years ago when he began writing, Kulothungan had seen immense possibilities to prove that human excellence is well within the reach of man. There was plenty of idealism for we were still part of the Gandhian Age. There were also leaders who were ready to act and make bold gestures for the sake of one's mother tongue, and for bringing down division and hatred and for putting an end to all inequalities. Independent India was full of promise and the nation was entering the age of science and technology boldly.

But as the years became decades and we entered the nineties, the poet in Kulothungan must have felt numb at the way we had thrown away the priceless pearl of a great future like the base Indian in Shakespeare's play. Poems like 'Craving', 'Sorrow' and 'Distress' proclaim their content eloquently through their titles.

However, for the poet hunched over his creative forge, it is darkest before dawn, and such moods of frustration but act as a period of hibernation. Though Kulothungan chisels his poems carefully and avoids mythology, there is an occasional reference inspite of himself, for the legends and myths of ancient India have been subsumed in the nations's psyche. One of the images that has occurred a couple of times is the Vamana incarnation.

*"Though we have not understood*
*All of the external phenomena,*
*Being human we wished to know*
*About ourselves; as a welcome research*
*We began to seek out. Analysing*
*The body, we realised*
*It is but flesh, blood and bones;*
*But we have not seen the parameters*
*Of Vamana, the mind which is higher*
*than the sky, vaster than space,*

*and has the power*
*To become the minutest*
*Of the most minute particle."*

***(Tr. Prema Nandakumar)***

May be now the time has come for the Vamana of lyricism to become the Trivikrama of epic poetry. When a poet is touched by vision, he does grow into cosmic proportions, and though this is quite, quite unpredictable, it is fascinatingly possible. After all Kulothungan himself has written with immense self-confidence:

*"If there be God, I have but*
*One boon to ask;*
*I shall be God myself".*

■ **Prema Nandakumar**

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# Pattukottai Kalyanasundaram
## (1930 - 1959)

S. Ravindranathan

**S. Ravindranathan**

Head, Department of English, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, is a specialist in Comparative Literature and Drama. His articles have been published in various journals, including *The Shavian,* London.

# Pattukottai Kalyanasundaram

Pattukottai Kalyanasundaram (1930 - 1959) belongs to the tradition of Bharathi and Bharathidasan. As Bharathidasan had his creative apprenticeship under Bharathi Kalyanasundaram began his poetic career as an assistant of Bharathidasan. The world now rightly calls them as "great poet (Mahakavi), revolutionary poet and people's poet", respectively. Bharathi's poems set the foundation for the freedom of the country and the humanity. Bharathidasan's poems, on the other hand, attempted to destroy the various discriminations in the name of caste and religion in the free country, India. Kalyanasundaram, rightly called as "people's poet", fought to destroy the gap between the haves and the have-nots. He was convinced that communism was the only way out and he fought for the real freedom of the common man. What is significant is, he did not intellectualize communism. He advocated it in its most natural form.

Though he wrote for cinema he never compromised. There are great poets who deviate from their principles when they write for the film, the popular medium. And they would also justify their stand saying that they give what the people want. Kalyanasundaram, on the other hand, created an awareness in the minds of the common people. His poems are simple, but not vulgar. There was no intellectual complexity but he could reach the audience straight. He wrote for the common man; and he wrote about the common man. He made use of traditional music patterns but the lines were relevant to the modern situation. He was a genius and the poet of the common man. Bharathi died at the age of thirty-nine, Shelley at thirty, Kalyanasundaram at the age of twenty-nine. Though it is not cirtically valid to argue that "had he lived longer he would have done this and that", it is really true that had Kalyanasundaram lived longer he would have excelled any Tamil poet of eminence.

He was both a communist and a rationalist. While other poets see Sakthi as Kali and Parvathi, Kalyanasundaram sings in praise of Sakthi as human energy:

*Human energy has touched the Moon*
*Human energy has surpassed history*
*Human energy has disproved*
*the grammer that Indira is the King of the sky.*

Both as rationalist and a Communist, Kalyanasundaram advocates self-reliance. Man should have self-respect and self-confidence:

*Fear not troubles and tribulations!*
*No sadness to the victor over despair.*
*Trust your own self to soar in life;*
*None offer any help here.*

Only in this connection, Kalyanasundaram chides God and idol worship. He laughs at the pitiable condition that one needs the help of agents even to worship god and is silent about all the atrocities that happen around:

*Straight under your nose*
*All atrocities are staged;*
*Noisy proclamation with frenzied dance,*
*Is this service to God?*
*To worship, to offer pure worship,*
*Is flashy decoration a must?*
*Should there be such jostling,*
*Shuffles and struggles?*

He deduces a kind of philosophy from the rat-race prevalent in the contemporary community:

*If a goat is stranded*
*Fox is jubilant*
*If a Fox is caught*
*The hunter is happy*
*The shameless man*
*Claims ownership on*
*whatever he sees.*
*The bitter truth, on the other hand, is*
*you own only light feet*
*what do you own*

*what do you own*
*You don't own anything.*

He is equally emphatic of the human predicamant which in inevitable:

*The grey hair*
*End of the story shows.*

His understanding and presentation of the common man's predicamant is quite interesting. He says that when sombody wants to do public service he does not have the money for it, but when he has the money he fails to remember the public welfare:

*When one thinks of public service*
*he does not have the money.*
*When he has fame and money*
*he does not remember public service*
*When he has money and the mind to help*
*he does not have peopie*
*Who can implement that schemes*

Born and brought up in an agrarian family, Kalyanasundaram knows the nuances of agriculture but what affects him the most is the pathetic predicament of agrarian labour. The dialouge between the farmer and his wife is striking:

*Mended the dryland*
*tirelessly ploughing it*
*Raising the bunds*
*planting paddy, watering*
*the land - now the paddy in the field*
*is ripe –*

The wife's reply is more striking and sociologically significant:

*The land is rich and fertile, but then*
*What do we gain?*

Another famous poem by Kalyanasundaram attacks not only the lazy but also their superstitious beliefs of the Tamil people :

*Those who spoiled their precious time in sleep*
*They spoiled the nation and also themselves spoiled.*
*Some who lazed, as if mere stones, through day and night,*
*Cursed their fate for lack of fortune.*

*Thoes who were alert prospered;*
*Those who snored like you lost everything*

Kalyanasundaram does not stop with highlighting the problems but also offers solutions. He is convinced that only hard labour can bring in prosperity:

*Man should be humane,*
*Bear this in mind, brother,*
*Bear this in mind.*
*You are the right hand for*
*the world in progress-*
*Remember that!*
*You should work for the*
*eradication of the*
*atrocities of private ownership;*
*You should work for that.*
*For, to believe that things will*
*change automatically is a lie*
*It is a blatant lie.*

Kalyanasundaram claims that workers are great people and workers alone can be great. He gives a long list of great men who were basically labourers:

*... the brave Napoleon*
*was a mason;*
*... The great Russian leader Stalin*
*was a cobbler;*
*The self-styled scientist G.D. Naidu*
*was a driver;*
*Sir C.V. Raman too was a labourer.*
*Education is a must - but that should go*
*with the will to work - For progress*
*Both should go together.*

After independence, folklore songs began to be energized. The communist movement was the main force behind it. The quality of simplicity and naturalness of Kalyanasundaram's poems could be understood from this perspective. During his early life he was influenced by rationalistic views, later he began to accept the views of communism. His poems reflect both the views. He was convinced that man is the only

thinking species; he only could bring in science and civilization; but then capitalism is seen as an enemy of community and he advocates that communism is the only way out. For poets like Kalyanasundaram, humanism was the ultimate goal and he found communism as a means to an end-an effecive means at that.

■ **S. Ravindranathan**

## Where Is God?

Have you seen man's handiwork? O, Lord,
The stable world and
Straight customs
Are turned topsy-turvy,
Due to man's haphazard ways.
The thoughts of devotees
Dwell on the daily-distributed 'prasad'.

If hunger and the clamour for the 'prasad' wane
The love for god and the liking for bhajans too will fade.
Pretenders, cheats, they are,
Real lazy bugs they are.

Straight under your nose
All atrocities are staged;
Noisy proclamation with frenzied dance
Is this, the service to god?
To worship, to offer pure worship,
Is flashy decoration a must?
Should there be such jostling.
Shuffles and scuffles?

The devotees' eyes dart here and there
But folded palms 'pray' here;
The sky and the Wind You are,
the Shine and the Rain You are
Dwelling all over
You are omnipresent.

Look at the plight - Payment alone
Can show us your face;
Locked are the temple doors,
Currency is the key to open those.

## Trust Your Own Self

Look at this world so wide, son,
Learn the lesson of your life.
Courage is the correct thing for the youthful heart,
Erase the sings of depression with labour.

Fear not troubles and tribulations!
No sadness to the victor over despair.
Trust your own self to soar in life;
None will offer any help here.

Creators of chasms of difference there are;
So also faithful followers of those.
Greedy of gain, even friends
Walk into dangerous pits;
Trouble-mongers thrive here.

## The Evil - Doers

Come out O, Sun,
Perceive man, his state
The evil-minded are many
Tread with care thy way.

At dawn-when
The rested souls bestir,
The aching-hands, well-rested,
Get ready for fresh labour;
The state of the world sends
A shiver through the body,
The evil air of the land
Drives justice into hiding
Fearsome spectres haunt
The place;
Cankerous thoughts stem
In evil minds.

For the nation's growth
Many do good deeds;
To spoil the good-some
Indulge in treacherous deeds;
Even in beggary, some
Cannot observe unity;
you know all these truths,
Yet hate none.

## Education And Labour

Need is education-So also
Labour-to progress-
Needed is education-along with that
Labour.
Truth will be revealed
the World will be revealed
Through education-Our
Physical growth and industrial growth

Too will be there
Through labour.

Nations that progressed
Due to labour are very many;
Two are the reasons
that consititute the
Progress of mankind
Coupled with mental maturity.

The brave Napoleon
was a mason,
The great Russian leader Stalin
was a cobbler,
The self-styled scientist G.D. Naidu
was a driver,
Sir C.V. Raman too was a labourer.
Education is a must - but that should go
With the will to work - For progress
Both should go together.

Be it population explosion,
Or the spread of famine,
The rich Midases make
Many attempts to amass more.
Labour is the only solution
To wipe out any shortage.
Lest people shed lazy rest,
Doldrums will the country's state.

*(All poems Tr. S. Ravindranathan)*

# Sirpi Balasubramaniam
## (b. 1936)

R. Balachandran

**Dr. R. Balachandran (Bala)**

well known poet, literary critic and translator. His critical introduction to Tamil New Poetry (1981) is reckoned as a classic on the subject. Presently, he teaches in Department of English, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Thirunelveli.

# Sirpi Balasubramaniam

Sirpi, the poet celebrated with canonical reverence, hails from Athupollachi, a remote village in Coimbatore District of Northern Tamilnadu, with lush green fields surrounded by the rivulets of Azhiyar, known for its coconut, paddy and sugarcane cultivation. True to the poetic settings from which he comes, Sirpi lisped in numbers quite early in life, even while he was a school student. On completion of his schooling at Tathamangalam in Kerala, he joined Jamal Mohammed College, Trichy for his Intermediate Course, and went to Annamalai University to take his Honours Degree in Tamil Language and Literature. He was awarded a doctorate degree for his dissertation, "A Comparative Study of Bharathi and Vallathol". Sirpi taught at N.G.M. College, Pollachi for well over three decades, before taking his position as the Head, Department of Tamil, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore. Now he lives in Pollachi after his retirement from the University, but he is tremendously active as could be seen in his three recent poetry volumes, many translations and his articles on matters of current interest.

Sirpi has more than ten poetry collections to his credit in addition to one verse - drama and three collections of essays. His literary career began in the late sixties when he wrote poems on the model of Bharathidasan, the creator of the Dravidian School of poets, who appreciated his poetic gifts profusely. Very soon, the poet found his master and mentor in the writings of Subramania Bharathi, the renowned bard of Freedom Movement. Caught up by the ideals of Bharathi, his poetry effused a new nationalist fervour and a rare revolutionary mood.

The seventies turned out to be a momentous period in his career when he joined hands with a band of highly talented free-verse poets committed to leftist ideologies, which resulted in the emergence of now-well-known, *Vanambadi* Movement. He was the central force behind the

movement which ushered in a new era of poetic composition, with its formal and thematic innovations, a great break from both the traditional school of poets as well as the immediate modernist poets - the *Ezhuthu* School and the decadent and outrageously provocative *Kachatathapara* School. The movement was of historical importance in many senses – responsible for the popularity of little magazine culture as well as for the birth of left poetry of wide reach. During this period, his poetry collections *Olipparavai* and *Sarpayagam*, were published which affirmed his poetic gifts and created for him a wide audience ranging from academicians to little magazine writers. With the break in the Vanambadi Movement, while many of his fellow poets went into a shell of silence, he continued to write and retained his position as the most influential Tamil New Poet.

A full length survey evaluating his art and mind has been issued recently authored by the well-known fiction writer C.R. Ravindran. Sirpi is known for his liquid diction, fine images mostly drawn from nature and a critical use of myth, bordering on the reinterpretation of myths. As M.T. Vasudevan Nair declares, "Sirpi's poetry is not syrupy sweet; it is rough and harsh that is quite natural as he is tackling the complex contemporary reality".

His poetry is not traditional and yet it pleases; it is not audaciously experimental and yet there is a lot of innovation in it; he is lyrical but not brief, he is in fact known for his long narratives; he is up-to-date and contemporary in his choice of themes; and there is nothing that could be predicted in the range of his themes, for they include both private and public themes, poems on simple rustic life, and those on environment care and pollution menace. This great range has assured him the place of the most important Tamil poet of our days.

Sirpi's *Soorya Nizhal* revealed his universal vision and scientific temper. His recent collections reveal a mature craftsman and a quester into private as well as cosmic worlds. His collection *Oru Kiramathin Kathai* includes pen portraits of personages of his village. The poems also record nature and the past recreated from memory with nostalgic splendours. In his latest collection *Poojyankalin Sangili* Sirpi's metaphysical probe has crystallized into poems of riddles and irony. U.R. Ananthamurthy has rightly pointed out that Sirpi's poems have distinct intellectual content and 'enigmatic meaning'. Sirpi's art seems to be continuously changing and his thematic domain has been steadily widening. This ever expanding creativity is perhaps the reason for Sirpi's strong hold on his audience who include the discerning critics and brilliant poets as well.

■ **Dr. R. Balachandran**

## Time

As Life's evolutionary journey
Inched forward
Flew ahead
Swam further
From the rhymic movement of life splashed
A droplet – Me:

As starry dust atoms
Time and I
Were hiding within the mystic womb
Of the Cosmos Infinite.

Time and I spread shoots and branches
Not one after the other
Not one before the other
But as double hanging roots of Banyan
Ejected out in single delivery
As the left and right knots of one plait
As the two wings of the ancestral bird
Set free from the cage of universe.

As my breath of life enlivened the capillaries
And granted green wealth to the barren
Regions of my brain
Simultaneously was Time hatched into an offspring
Before me there was no Time
Nor did I exist ere Time
Such was our *dwaida* existence.

We were mute witnesses
To the tantric sights of
Birth and life, sleep and death
In the theatre of this Universe

We know how the Red Bird shed
A feather of heat, named Earth
We lay sunk hidden, and beaten
On the burst mouths
In vaporous scorches
Within frozen ice layers
Beneath the first ebb and flow
Of sea water of this Earth.

We went for jolly rides
On the backs of Dinosaurs

Across megaforests deep
When the fourlegged ones
Stamping their hindlegs strong
Shot up their frontlegs as hands
Excitement ran through my brains
I became what I am,
And Time became what it is:

That day 'today' came alive in moments
'Yesterday' was sweated out as the old
'Tomorrow' beckoned with surprises

I had sunk my face in molecules
I matured and riped into humanity
Time too unfurled into segments called seasons:
My face, Tomorrow,
My moving legs, Today

Mounting seconds over seconds
Placing steps over steps
Lodging Eternity in the wombs of atoms
I was on a journey endless —
With Time by me, and I with Time
Both hand in hand.

I a Child of atoms
Any damage to this Earth
Makes me weep
Any little delight
Makes me jump in excitement.

Hereafter there is no death for me
For *I've become Time!*

***(Tr. Bala)***

**Lone Bamboo**

One single bamboo
stands forlorn.

"I wait and wait
for long days I wait
for the black clouds to arch over the earth,
for the wings of the wind to tear the sky,
for the dark to tremble at the flash of the
lightning
for the dry dust to become wet with rain

for the thirst of my parched heart to be
quenched,
I wait and wait
for long days I wait.

Once long ago
on a sylvan mound
of blinding street I stood;
the parrot sat on the branch,
the linnet sang in the bush,
young cowherds lounged in mirth,
amidst the crimson laughter of country lasses
I grew into a flute.

Today
in the mound at my feet
lives the black cobra,
the prickly alone
withers in the heat
the dry black soil crumbles
and I wait for relief
from the tyranny of time".

One single bamboo
stands forlorn.

***(Tr. P.G. Sundararajan)***

## Serpent Yagna

Our nation is but
A Board of Serpent and Ladder
At every square waits
Poisonous snakes
Adishesa, Karkodaka,
Glassy vermins, Flying Snakes
With spreaded hoods
Wrinkled bodies
Wait and lie in coil.

We throw the dice
And start the journey
Only to halt with a bite
To stop at a hiss
So many are they, the dark vermins
Driving us back to the start!
Hidden Sarai blocks our road to God

We say our prayers for some way
And throw the dice
We fall on your mouths
And scale down on your tails
To turn again 'yesterday's.

There are some Ladders
Here and there
As we go up on them
We slip down
Wetted by venomous tongues.

You Adishesa!
You manage the globe placed on your head!
You Vasuki Snake!
You hold tight the Manthra Hills
To churn the Sea of Milk for selfish ends!
You won't allow us to reach
The 'paramapada'
If only we roll the dice
And wait and wait with shiver in our hearts;

Hence we begin a Yagna,
– To devour all snakes –
A Serpent Yagna.
The Yagna will burn and char
The snakes of all length and colour
The small and the big
The long and the short
From Flower vermin to Fire Snakes!

We then would make
A Paradise
Out of the Holy Ash of our Yagna
The fruit of our arduous task!

For ours is an age
of 'Janame Jeya!'
(Victory to People)

*(Tr. Bala)*

**Thirst**

At dusk
Sky and stars
Reflected on the river water –
A draft I cupped within my hands.

As I took it near my mouth
Floated there
my face.

Stunned as I let go
The water, was heard
My Voice.

*(Tr. Bala)*

## A Village River

Where from comes
This river?
Breaking the
Silence of Mountains?
Tearing the
Silks of clouds?
Trickling from the
Secrets spoken by woods?

No, it flows from
My self...
Opening the springs private
Within me
Titillating my breasts
Dispersing the scents
of grass and flowers
into my veins
Drenching me entire
Dissolving me...

Flows this river.
Here too are little Krishnas
Stamping winding snakes
Playing little flutes
Breaking out in joy
This is my Yamuna.

Here too are
Beds for final sleep,
– Harischandra's graveyards –
and wet wombs to carry
the remnants holy burnt left overs
This is my Ganga.

Picking no quarrel
Flows into neighbouring state
This is my Cauvery.

❑

Upparu runs into this
and merges
This is my *Palaru*.
This is the salt of blood,
My mother's milk.
Unread legends
and incomplete myths,
are there, on this bank.

❑

Its artful waves
Sculpt the rocks.
It resembles
during day
a painting flowing
During the night
it is an anklet
That jingles in rhyme
With the breeze blowing
from the distance

❑

This river –
It is food,
Its fish too food;
And I too shall end
a food to this river!
This was the mat
I slept on
The mirror I looked

❑

The Veena of my love
The bedroom private of
my solitudes;
A ground that witnessed
My Gaspings;

A big drop of tear
That flows unable to
Stand the weight of sorrows
A silver paper it is
That keeps intact my memories;

A canal of sorrows
An ocean of joys
My blue blood
A navel to my
poems ancient
A parchment of
my last document



This great poem
That parades on the
Shoulders of Time
Between the words
drains a silence –
and that's me!

*(Tr. Bala)*

## From *Poojyankalin Sangili* (Chain of Zeroes)

### Mind, a vessel

It was noon time
When shadows pitch their roots at centre

The Guru was lying
With his head resting on a rock

Slowly, very slowly
The disciple was fanning him

Seeing him lost in thoughts
The Guru inquired :

'My son, what engages your mind, now?'

'What disturbs my mind is
a question, my Guru'

'What is your question, son?'

'What is mind?
my mind is teased'

'I'll tell you,
It's a vessel
but a strange one, it is'

'Strange?' The disciple
Inquired in surprise

Then the Guru said,
"Mind is a vessel
but if you put desires into it
The bottom will detatch,
it'll never be full."

'Suppose, if sorrows were put in?'
said the disciple.

'The vessel won't bear it,
it'll break.'

If love passionate for a beloved was put..?

'The vessel will grow wings
and will fly away!'

'If pure love was filled
what'll happen, my teacher?;

'Then it will shine in
golden brilliance, pure.'

'If jealousy was put?'

'The vessel in fret
will be found missing.'

'What should be done,
for it to remain full and wholesome?'
said the disciple.

With kindly eyes
The Guru said,
*'Keep it Empty!'*

***(Tr. Bala)***

# Abdul Rahman
## (b. 1938)

V. Sam Sahayam

**Dr. V. Sam Sahayam**

is a senior professor of English in Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Thirunelveli. He is a scholar in commonwealth literature, and writes poetry in English.

# Abdul Rahman

Honoured with the award of the title 'Kavikko', meaning, "King, Among Poets", the recent Sahitya Academy Award winner, Abdul Rahman, has been, for long, reckoned as one of the most outstanding Tamil poets of our time.

The 'persona' of Rahman's poetry is the traditional sage-seer-poet, who, though very much representative of his generation, dwells apart, often assuming a hallowed pedestal of wit, wisdom and dispassionate advocacy of all-embracing human(e) insights, writing with self-conscious authority vested on him by virtue of his natural endowments.

There is not a single facet of human experience that has escaped Rahman's incisive comment: ranging from cradle to grave; passion to transcendence; aphorisms gleaned out of conventional wisdom to questioning and rebellion, all informed with updated knowledge, honed and sharpened in the anvil of a curious, original intellect.

Lyricism is in Rahman's blood. The poet has an amazing facility to forge imagery and rhythm in effortless strings of rhythms or magical amalgam of lyricism.

*Come, my love,*
*We are the warp*
*and the woof*
*the woven thread of breath*
*of nostrils*
*connecting poles ...*

The macrocosmic sweep of the metaphysical psyche cannot be missed on occasions such as these.

Rahman's essential greatness lies in his transcendence of narrow religious or communal schisms and barriers. His poems are striking

instances of intertextuality which exploit the myth, history and ritual of all religions of the land. There are delightful occasions where the poet shows a teasing familiarity with several myths and legends taken out of Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, only to problematize and interrogate them in turn, with an extremely lively insight, all in the name of humanity, and promotion of communal and social harmony. His "Fallen Angels" are eloquent, rhetorical pieces questioning the vogues and values of contemporary Tamil society with extraordinary, irrepressible verve and vigour. It is obvious that the poet has little patience for mere shams, as his own values are consistently transcendent. The ease and effortlessness with which he lays his claim for being a classic in his own right in Tamil poetry, is truly amazing.

There is no dearth of sociological commentary in Rahman. Being profoundly moved by poverty and ignorance of his fellowmen, the poet, often, involves the wisdom of thinkers like Marx in his poems, though he does not subscribe to any fixed dogma or formula, as a definitive solution to our socio-economic ills.

Neither does Rahman's poetry confine itself to any particular genre. His compositions range from haikus, to long narratives and dramatic monologues. There are striking instances of post-modern and feminist insights in his poems which commend themselves to connoisseurs of literature, as well as moments of melting sentiments and simple lyricism which make an instant appeal even to the uninitiated.

For all the rousing reception his earlier anthologies entitled "Listener's Choice" and "Milky Way" found among his critics and scholars, his most recent collection "Overture" makes a tremendous advance in terms of its increased confidence and visionary assurance, indicative of a sustained inner growth of a maturing poetic talent and a sensibility, eminently worth cherishing for Tamils. Rahman has done the Tamils, and Tamil, proud.

■ **V. Sam Sahayam**

**The Earth**

For lives
I'm the origin and womb
and, at last,
their final tomb

New tendrils are my thrills;
blooms, my dreams

Jungles, my ample bosom;
Hillsides, my luxuriant locks

Cornfields, my lusty hands;
Sea shores, my handmaid
and deserts –
blisters of my long summer

I blossom in Spring;
make love in monsoons
and fast in autumn

Mother bears you
for a mere ten-month span;
I bear you all your life
and death

Mother rejects your corpse
at last, while
I receive you
readily in my body

You loll on my breasts first
and enter me at the end –
an exactly opposite route
You take with your mother.

I remain your tomb
and the womb of your seeds
at the same time.

I create, provide
and destroy, often,
creating only to destroy
as God's agent

I'm your cradle
Your dining platter
and the litter
for your final slumber

Damned are those
who desire to possess me
and honoured will be those
who shed their last drop of blood
for me, in devotion.

I'm never barren.
I suspect the virility
of anyone who doubts
my fertility

I laugh at the idle
who end up with nothing,
but weep with those
who too gain nothing
despite all their labour

I despise anyone
who tries to dominate me
and desire him
whoever creates
something new in love

I feel elated
even when being trampled
but ashamed
when you make
a begging bowl
of me

Score me and tear me
I give you food
wound me and pierce me
I'll still feed you

Pregnant women
learn patience,
consuming my sand
at moments of
their nausea

In fact,
I'm not totally
alien to you
we're both the same.

We're different vessels
made of the same stuff

styled by the very same
Potter of Time.

*(Tr. V. Sam Sahayam)*

## My God! You lent me a hand

My sixth finger bleeds
down the cross
Yes –
and my flesh
becomes Word

*(Tr. V. Sam Sahayam)*

## So long as it runs

Needling memory hands
indicating moments
on the dial
of my wounds
of solitude
with the tick
of heart beat
echoing
your foot steps
at departure.

*(Tr. V. Sam Sahayam)*

## Thirst

My gardener neighbour
who has chopped my branches
trespassing the fence!
what can you do about my roots
straying beyond your fence
underneath the ground?

*(Tr. V. Sam Sahayam)*

## Wear Nudity

Thou, O, Serpent!
Wear your body
Over the skin!
O, Adam's mistress!
Strip yourself off your skin!

So that I shall wear
nudity

*(Tr. V. Sam Sahayam)*

## Thirst

Lost in confusion
I winked at Venus
with my mind's eye

My mind's eye
saw tears
in the daylight reverie

Despite the flooding
light around
you have grown dull
and dim,
O, my mind's eye!
Here, wear this
Flower spectacle
and see.

One day,
my mind's eye raised an alarm.
In a fit of anger,
I burnt the lids
of my own eyes.
Could someone
lend me eyelids, please,
for I'm not able
to sleep?

*(Tr. V. Sam Sahayam)*

## Fallen Angels : Angel of Peace

Behold, the procession of
the Angel of Peace
is making way

advancing in front
in the rolling flood of newspapers
borne high
in an exalted, eagle altar
she makes her gradual progress
basking in the festoon wings

of songs of praise
savouring each sweet perfume
of banners.

Lulled in lilting, flowing accolades
of tunes of flutes and bands
swaying with the dance gesture
of a wheeling, white dove
in level flight,
the Angel of Peace
is fast approaching
ahead of a huge procession.

Should you miss this chance
You may never get another
like this
Come, hurry up,
Let's all enjoy this
hilarious joke

The Angel of Peace
is making her way
leading a procession!

*(Tr. V. Sam Sahayam)*

## Angel of Wisdom

Holding a banner of chameleon colours
in one hand
and a string of ascetic beads
in the other,
having jarred the harmonious lyre
wearing a solemn black gown ...

the bloom of bright lotus
has gone back these days
reeking of murk and fields.

In her hallowed coffers
are only the dismembered toes of
exceptional artisans ...

As for devotional, flattering songs
at present
readily available
are those cracked, ancient gramophone records
which can, mechanically keep on harping
the same stuff

Even the singular bright rays of the sun
at moments of rare eclipses
well-defined by sages of yore
fail to light up
the blind, fanatic eyes
bent on defying
ancient wisdom.

*(Tr. V. Sam Sahayam)*

## Angel of Wealth

You were designed
as a lamp maid
holding up the flame
Why did you usurp
the sanctum sanctorum?

Donning the wedlock string
of the covetous Capitalist
You've lost your chastity.

Spurning all genuine gestures of love
of the multitudes of your poor lovers
skeletal wretches
now reduced to charred wicks
of burnt out lamps
you have chosen to enter
through the back door
with your soiled feet, reeking of filth

Off smelly gutters,
utterly charmed by the one
who has lured you

Your hallowed, magnetic temple
is now a common shandy,
where even stars
offer to shed their radiance
for a price.

*(Tr. V. Sam Sahayam)*

## Tears of Night

I met the enchanting Night
when she was undressing herself
putting off all the stars

"Who are you?", she asked me
"I'm your lover", I said
"How can you be my lover?", she asked
"I can't help falling in love", I replied
"The sheer mystery
of your beauty
turns me on", I added.

"Daylight lays everything bare;
her shameless nudity
repels me

but as for you, you're some one
who keeps your charms hidden
and so you fascinate me much

The cup of the sun
is brim with the liquor of fire
while your cup of moon
is filled with the wine of poetry

Daylight is a corner spider
bent on spinning her web
for trapping her prey
but your fingers weave
soft tunes on the gentle veena

Daylight is a mere newspaper;
you are an epic

Daylight makes but an empty noise;
but as for you
you are a meaning –
filled with silence

Daylight is public knowledge;
while you are fashioned out of mystery

You are one
who can never, be known, completely,
That's why I'm in love with you", I said.

"Why do you gift me
I ventured to ask her now
this starry letter of love?
Is'nt this your billet doux
addressed to me?"

"Stars are not letters", she said
"They are simply my tear drops".

"What's the cause of your grief?,
may I know?", I asked

"Daylight is a garish stage;
Men prowl around in it in disguised
And I am their unmasking secret"

"I feel grieved and weep at the thought of
those betrayed by day", she said.

But don't dream damsels
dance on your dais all night?", I asked

"T' is true",
"but so do dark ghosts
born to fear", she said

"Don't you drug the dumb and the wicked
to deep slumber
and preserve the rest of us from evil?", I asked

"But hounds and brutes too get roused up
and hunt around in my shade
Thieves and the evil ones exploit my cover of darkness", she said

"Aren't you the healing balm for our wounds?", I asked

"T' is true but there are hurts
particularly caused by me", said she

"Aren't you the time for love,
and your paths strewn with flowers of passion ?", I asked

"T' is true but
there are broken splinters,
among those flowers too
which make my own feet bleed", she said

"Aren't you the one, giving us
the supreme respite of sleep?", I asked

"T' is true, but there are also eyes and hearts,
defying sleep;
whenever I see them,
I weep bitter tears", she said

Joining her sad company,
I too, broke down.

***(Tr. V. Sam Sahayam)***

# Tamilanban

S.A. Sankaranarayanan

**S.A. Sankaranarayanan**

is a professor of English. He teaches in Government Arts College (Autonomous) Kumbakonam. He has translated many of Tamilanban's poems into English.

# Tamilanban

After Bharathi, Bharathidasan; after Bharathidasan, Tamilanban – This is a step-up transformation in the Tamil poetry scene of 20th century Tamil land. In this step-up, the poet under question is extremely privileged to feel society becoming, while his maker-mentor Bharathidasan felt Tamil-history becoming and Bharathi had felt for its possible becoming anything else than what he had envisioned. Thus poetry in Tamil now has become utterance about a great social act of transformation in the moment of its accomplishment.

Bharathi - Bharathidasan - Tamilanban is an inward relation that leads us on to think that we are its pupils and successors. This is a venerable prejudice to be put aside at last, once our understanding is fair and substantially complete. Beyond this hyphenation, one might view Tamilanban as a secondary result or reflex or attendant phenomenon, in poetic scenario, akin to the "movement poets" of England after Yeatsian "last romantics". Writers like Sirpi, Gnanakoothan and Rahman might likewise parallel or contend with a hint of mythical force or belated romanticism for the same claim. This is in a way critically succumbing to the dangers of ideoloogy of one's own and one's image of one's own sensibility of this or that ideology in a philological mirror.

No poetry whatsoever is free from mirroring; and in its self-limitation it pays the penalty for taking over the causal from the natural. The purpose at hand is to see the natural in Tamilanban without the pragmatism that sketchily copies the world-picture drawn by his poetry. Should we subject the mass of a poet's poetic material to critical examination with the sole expedient of considering one complex of - isms as being primary and causative and the rest as being not! This is conclusively proved by the foreworders to his poetic works, determining survival, governed not by chance but by definite deliberate tendency. This is akin to the Atticism of

the Augustan Age and displays its own pedantic bearing. It is good that a critic feels an immanent necessity in the work to determine its survival rather than turn his back on poetry in despair.

Poetry as culture product is opposed to poetry as civilization; and this opposition is too humanist to overcome the frailties of seeing. For, the finest mind ever abdicates the function of unrestricted criticism. Can we obscure the data or undervalue Tamil and Tamils over thousands of years and project our own deepest needs on to the picture? May I direct our Tamils from much that is in Tamilanban that they choose not to see thereby saving their inward image of Tamils which in reality is the background of a life-ideal. Tamil-created with its own world-feeling beyond questions of good and evil, as a phantom or an audacious description. The poem can never be faked! Thanks to its organic quality by being a sequel and fulfilment of its antecedent within or without the poet.

The form-problem of poetry in Tamilanban is that of province! The destiny of whole mankind that lies outside the radiation circle of Tamil land is this. The language and its psyche is so scopeful that its enlargement and coverage of any place whatever is location - worthy of it; and any person whoever is relation-worthy of it! Viewed thus, the forewords and criticisms hitherto available in parts, in making and in full-fledged ideological strands are derailed by misreading. This is what has to be viewed from the authentic in the poet's work in a time-free perspective. The provincially conceived franchise to keep alive the illusion of popular self-affirmation (We see in the poet) is at the root of all writers even in languages not as rich and deep as Tamil. The emergent question on this illusion is if the anarchic sensuousness and impressionistic tendencies were really existent?

The answer to the question is easily found in the tangible and comprehensible expression of acts, opinions, religion, state, politics, arts and sciences, people, economic, social reforms and whatever collocate with life! Thus, instantly related to becoming, Tamilanban's poetry here proposes to actualize the possible and disposes to idealize the remaining! The basic determination of meaning is largely incommunicable by specification. Better one intuits him than sizes him up.

The Sangam-and-onward factor, the Tamil prosody-grammar factor, and then the scope of the language Tamil in its constituent linguistic permutability as factor, the Bharathi - Bharathidasan factor are factors unignorable and active in his percipient fancy and fury, a product of

rational procedure and technical demarcation of Cogito / thought! The sign of prosody is mythicized in the act. The slicing to delimit the extended thought in words is more in setting them forth in the form of begging the question on unities and pluralities. Poetry thus far to the poet become the aggregate of that which cannot be enumerated in signs of the complicated ceremonial coldness of the antique one will be forced to wonder whether there is or can be prosody as such. The genuine awakening of Cogito in Tamilanban's is ipso facto freed from the prosodic and therefore to an extent basically linguistic, (here, Tamilistic). This is a fact of decisive importance hidden ever from perceptive Marxist Critics like Gnani whose *Tamilanban - Padaippum Parvaiyum* is posteriori classification enabling the reader to reduce the strong outward feeling to abstract the content of the poetic. Thanks to the intellectual prepossessions: the alleged validity of independence from the classical is a proof of a quite particular necessity of content that underlies all poet's thought as axiomatic and to which he is subject by virtue of not belonging to his own culture and no other! Thus we have in the poet two very different kinds of apriori thought-content-- one culture specific and the other ism-specific; with a definition of a frontier between them as between the pure and the applied art. So far no one foreworder has dared to assume that the supposed structure of Tamilanban's poetic intellect is in illusion and that the poetry occluded in his writings spread out contains more than one style of knowing. From Kailasapati to Gnani atleast the occlusion remains in fact. Unanimity prior to problematizing does not imply truth. As a translator with comparatist incline, one may be able to demonstrate that a frontier exists between the two thought-contens and the problem there of lies beyond all possibilities of knowing for words can be tested on grounds of fact when the actualization of the possible would be over as intended by his writings. This is purely unchronized social side of the author's authentic being.

The considerable poetic output of Tamilanban is appreciated even at the start as a title of a work signifying one sole existent thought content. The symbolic importance of it (involving paradox in most cases) bears a relation to the concept and the idea of a person. If the title is not known by the reader then the reading confines to the somatic, mere word-on-the page: it can't stretch itself to cover the designation of the office of the words almost exhausting the religious possibilities of language and its convention, its semantics and descending into the inorganic, mechanistic. This office of words with their mechanistic character comes with the "dawn" of civilization. The Indian Democractic Socialism thus could

acquire mechanistically what this early subjection of this land for centuries lived organically! However the paradox is doxological in a way to admit freedom of attitude drawing a line between the toleration demanded by the god-feeling and that forbidden by it. When words persecute unknown gods as Athens did by building altars, the sacrifices made to the integrity of cult is only at the cost of not impugning their geometric existential conception: (There are poems or parts of poems to this effect) as in Satyric dramas. Astraddle on the shoulders of Periyar and Bharathidasan, the poet could bring the great views of life into shapes and by notions deconstruct them. Well that is the poetic way. A poem like "Asurayanam" is enough to prove this deconstruction through its own creole!

*Isles Swim Ashore*
*Dumb Sun*
*A Star-time Before Time*
*The Plaits of Dawn*
*Dhoe Careens*
*Suncrescents*
*A Voice from the Womb*
*Dormer East*
*A Madar Plant In My Housefront*
*Snowing Day-time.*

The River Bed-ridden and The Stream Running Amuck are some enough to show the ortho- or hetero- or both in the "doxy" of the poet. Howsoever much be the technical Virtuoso quality, no ism is fully volitional and intellectual. In terms of what remains, what has remained hither to is understood. This is a modulo-device! Be the poet Marxist, Tamilist, Maoist or Taoist, or any doctrinalist, he is representing the precedence of an act of unimpaired formative power entirely compatible with a wistful desire for non-interfering with habits of thought or challenging the convictions. Did not Haydn call Beethoven an atheist after listening to him? All profane causality is inclusively mechanical in a state active with creative jealousy as a foundation on which forms of literary oligarchy would easily get built up. In this combination is the factual web or hyphenation in Bharathi-Bharathidasan-Tamilanban is confirmedly producing an idea of "dynasty". May I leave it here as a mark of the poet's position historical with an idea of irreligion as Medicean Florentines did! "After the power of the pulpit, the power of the press!"

*The Embers That Remain After Burning Nandan* analogously is electrodynamic in that, the force of poetic conviction adjusts the critics

within its field according its own intensity. Failure here means absence of conviction, in ecclesiastical language: Satanic! Admitting no freedom of attitude, are personages sacrificed to the integrity of the cult! May the critic beg the question here. The title is a terrible beauty! The intellect saves by flight - Anaxagoras, Alcibiades, or Aristotle! Where it doesn't save, it yields to condemnation. But the neo-Nandan like the 20th century Don Quixote of Graham Greene's, unnames the puranic Nandan who like a Pythagorean book of numa was "burnt" publicly - but to the gratification of what collectivism or what ideology? Poets might spin myth or cult figures as much as they desired. The dogmatic discoursing on data mythologic is one's liberty. One can like Lessing be against rites yet not doubt the faith that bred the cult. This is left for deeper research.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating! Highlights and Polarlights might be helpful punctiliously in conforming as to the poetic in Tamilanban. Two Greek words I invoke - "muthos" and "ethos". The ontogenetic modifications of these two can largely contribute to a facile understanding. Image, Symbol. metaphor, allegory, Ideology, and isms though put together, the absolute value is only a figment. As the modulo-device would help and support us, we might say that there "remains" some under-defined / undefined additive constant to any poet. Though actual critical practice is not concerned with it, it is safe to maintain the perspective is the provenance of the Tamil-Concept with the creed of the author. The wrath or heatedness in his lines having the plausible look of being static falls into its place on analysis when brought into a force-picture (Tamil-force), the picture of a quantity of fury made up of swift irregular movements of the collective with wrath or fury, as the mean visa vis of these collective people! This modulo device of appreciation applies to all sentiments, be they fancy, fury, fun, gaiety, valour, tear, wail or calm. Highlights and polar lights are the two meniscuses for a cursory understanding of the enunciated, iso-temporally compressed identity of Tamilanban.

Highlights: *"I'm fine. My received wounds are fine".*

*"I'm unfragmented now".*

*"Kissing the feet of the speakless illiterate sound attained Gnosis".*

*"For life's pilgrimage Music is not path but metric feet".*

*You who taught me to angle in the pool of Gnosis with a question-baited-hook".*

*"Water-veil clothing the bed-sore"*

*"Daily sheets tear the cowards"*
*"Before getting properly hued ensouled, why did you ask the sky for a stroke-brush?"*
*"Sky is Beauty; Earth too; bread crumb in my hand".*
*"Even the window-sun is a flesh-piece.*
*"Sky led me outside Prosody and preached poetry".*

Polar Lights: *"Consult Himmeleh and decide on"*
*"From random strokes Ravivarmas pop out"*
*"Beat one action-word"*
*"Listening to a line or two of you volcanos came to heat".*
*"Street is broken"*
*"To plate every gene with uni-colour*
*Let us take the laser-pen of science".*
*"Like Valentina Tereshkova on the roof of the world, /*
*May we Cosm-ambulate".*
*"Has God gone hid in camphorescence?"*
*"Star as a grain*
*Fell into his noggin-tin-cup".*
*"The power to beget sun*
*By cutting the setting west."*

Where poetic abounds and where the ideologue positions, become clear, in the meniscuses. These are the tips of the ice-bergs! However, this specimen reading has a diagnostic seriousness about it; and not simple recalling. While the poetic is conformable, the ideologic is likely to degenerate into inadvertent misreading: A word in guard: After the "anxiety of influence" the poet had undergone both at the "ismic" and "philosophic" levels, – despite his virtuoso traits fulcrum-ing him as a motif-maker, a mythopoeticizer, or demythologizer and the like, he proves the "provincialism" already stated as a culture-marker! It is a new resigned piety sprung from tortured conscience on society's behalf: half deluded by an impossible postulate that the face of this world, and whatever happens here are, as events and location, a complex region of social phenomenon completely insulated. Can the poet get over the superficial causality through either mythopoesis or dialectical rationalism? The question withers in the face of pure poetic possibilites which lets poems speak for themselves and confines the critics to sensing the destiny immanent in them and contemplating other unprosodicities that the reading

world may perhaps never penetrate. To conclude as "The Great Pan is Dead" for this poet, it to be too hasty as to applaud a Darwin without palaeontology. The bit of mythopoesis like a silver-line may speak for aboriginal existents of thoughts without transition-type controverting the "utilisation fitness" for invoking an evolved human life through ismic ideologies! Without whence, how, and why, a sudden mutation as a secret is likely even in the collective thought we know not how the die is cut for the whole genus.

Now as a translator of some of his poetic collections I intuit, that Tamilanban as a force strongly feels for the negative fact of people's (Tamils) living a subordinate existence in the middle of one or another phases of Tamil-Culture, without participation in its inner life. The result is a congeries of pathos, and love with respective modes of expression indiscriminately lumped together as far as the poetic license could permit it, with the pitch on the fragmentary on the residue without the integral in a "modulo-poetics" as I would prefer to call it. With possibilities yet to be actualized, the poet in him, may we expect, to out-do the veil of formulae and the dogmatic form-world and its social processes relating past and future: tacitly underlying the social-concept-foundations from the outset as a poetic induction to claim support from all theoretical schools of society and the praxis of it at its soil-level too. This by extension is a possible poetic outcome of his pen as an epic-end, a completion of an inwardly necessary evolution.

May this winding argument on Tamilanban be drawn to a point of reflection quoting the poet's own lines.

*Son of light!*
*Cogitate..! and*
*Become "Lux!"*
*Think aloft!*
*May Hills*
*Garland your Highness!*

■ **S.A. Sankaranarayanan**

## The Bird Of Manes!

These ravens I know well
Close to where I dwell,
with intimate calls
unmixed with music,
with forms that stay
All comments at a distance;
Like the darkened
soul of our land
wearing nocturns of sleep
in shreds - these crows.
From where could feathers
Have grown upon these?
From unfinalised deaths?
Or unwrit in-Memoriums?
Whose shadows are these
How long would they wing
Thus in search of the Real?
'You too are like I am,
A shadow mere', Thus a crow
In my ears caw'd in awe,
where am I to search my real ent?
Are our manes confined
In these cut-pieces of darks
For a handful of rice
We offer as lumps?
Why not manes
Become koel, parrot or mynah?
O! for fear of being caged
After thus encaged? is it so?
When upon roofs, manes
Perch with feathers buckled,
were I to mark my place
In their midst, won't it be easy
For successors...,
but, can I?

## That One-hour-time

Fear wheeled a Question
To the nearing Death
Wearing a black smile

With assoiled smell
Of a to-be-dug-grave.
"Shall I settle my account
Putting it off through an hour?" – Thus, I.
"Right, Quick
until then, let me
Cross-check the addressees
Subsequent", mumbled Death.
Where is my wife?, searched I ...
How would she survive, poor she!
Would there be light in my eyes
In my last gaze or not?...
I writhed to see for once
Her face on the wedding day
Through entering her eye!
Fill I must mine ears
With words of my children,
Sangunie songs of my blood ...
On my shoulders,
my laps,
they made
flowery moments
On leaving I must bag
the moments up,
some atleast.
Find I must, and pick I must
A few squabbles of those days
From within the hearts of the surviving, –
Those who got published along with me.

As print of affection,
Kiss I must for once
The Centre of friendship-pronouncing
Friends' Circle
Within Thoughts and Desires
Time and I have gone
Long afar
"Are you ready?"
Questioning, Death came by.
I dithered.
Life quipped: Leave at once
Right now you have lost
One Joy-hour in Death's hug.

## Unaccommodated In Compassionate History

Dreaming seas, seated are they
On a rivulet-ferry

What bound their minds
Disinterested to get up and leave
Even when dust-winds beat on
From the dried up rivulet-beds?

Like worms writhing sun-hit
They search the lost bones,
Becoming seeds, they adore rains
Sky opens its womb, pours fire.
On their house-line, eye-less electric lights
Never expose those that grow
Prickly thorns on their walks.

From every side of Time,
In hot winds,
They graze on disappointments;
And History moist with pity
Neither explains nor sustains them.

Grains from ration-shop card
Drop on their hungers
And cultivate ills.

Betwixt their breaths
Peeping out Death's faces......
Their names figure with those of the dead
In the electoral roll
Of democracy
That has looted Life
Tipping of a ballot paper!

## Light's Sojourn

When to sleep he went
Sun shook
His bed
Hence star-dust.

Which Gowtham sage
Cursed Night? –
Its body sore
With eyes galore?

Twilight broadcast
Sun-seed;
In a trice, how many flowers!
What a serious seed!

Stars I shall not
gratulate
Of Sun, they backbite
To Night.

All lamps,
Our land's girls,
Have consented
To skulk in dark.

Better be a wick
Of the lamp, slimming
Than a flag
On the mast flapping
– cotton's express call.

Of what use
Is the sky
With eyes open, many
When sun is gone stolen?

Mud-lamps
Are primary Schoolers
Collegers are electric lights.
Don't 'Cuts' explain this?

To bar light
Is moved a motion.......
With Lamps' support,
It became Law.

One day,
Would Truth eye Man
Then street lamps
In pride shall straighten up.

**When Blankness Fills In...**

Doors and windows
Can be made of this wood;
Openings' enquiry will run out.

Yet chairs and tripods
Are not unnecessary

Planks for the attic,
When things weep through
Wounds of uselessness
It does not itch our eyes.

Then, when one worries
Over not having made a box
for keeping old books...
Well, if, for children
We make play toys and give,
Their dreams translated,
Would come into their hands.

How long would they toy with?
Once they are adults
Their eyes too would itch.

Wood

To use up, there are a thousand ways.
Till one decide on what,
To keep it wooden blank
Is fit indeed!

Within Me
Attic plank, Chair. tripod
Play-things, thingumajigs
Box, window, door
Fill,
While into the blank of wood
Neither could I enter in full nor exit.

*(All poems **Tr. S.A. Sankaranarayanan**)*

# Meera
## (b. 1938)

Dr. P. Subas Chandrabose

**Dr. P. Subas Chandrabose**

has postgraduate degrees in Journalism and Tamil literature. He has to his credit a poetry collection and a book of criticism on Tamil New Poetry, in addition to many collections of essays, the most famous one being a criticism on Bharathidasan. Dr. Bose is now the Controller of Examinations of Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirapalli.

# Meera

Meera is one poet who needs no introduction to Tamil poetry audience. He is a well known academic, publisher, and a poet of eminence. During the sixties, he was attracted by the Dravidian party ideologies, and his early poems revealed a poet who owed allegiance to DMK ideologies and favoured the Bharathidasan style of poetry. Meera was educated in Thiagarajar College, Madurai, which was then the shaping spirit of Tamil nationalism and classicism. His early poems appeared in Dravidian party magazines during the early sixties, like *Murasoli,* signed as Mee Racendiran, for that was his real name. Later he came to be knowm as Meera as he was endearingly known among his friends. During his collegiate days, Meera was at once a DMK sympathizer, a follower of Periarist ideologies, and a lover of Tamil classicism. Naturally time shaped him into a Dravidian Movement poet, and many ranked him as a follower of Bharathidasan School of poetry.

Meera's early collections, *Racenthiran Kavithaikal (1965),* and *Munrum Aarum,* (1967) included poems published in magazines and rendered for poetry performances known as *Kaviarangams*. They reveal a traditional poet, with a flair for new idiom, but in terms of themes they were of great appeal to the youth and DMK sympathizers. In fact, his poems were hailed by C.N. Annadurai, the founder leader of DMK, in his regular columns that appeared in *Dravidanadu.* During the seventies he was influenced by communist party ideologies. It was a period when the world of Tamil poetry found Bharathi in a new light, and his many faceted personality had begun to attract the poets of the day. During this period traditional poetry was beginning to give way to new kinds of experimentation like poetic prose and prose poems. Meera was also influenced by the poems of Bharathi, Shelley, Gibran Khalil Gibran, Khandekar, and Tagore. When his poetry collection *Kanavukal +*

*Karpanaikal = Kakithangal,* appeared in 1971 Meera suddenly found himself as a pioneer in the art of prose poems. The collection was a stunning success. In the Introduction he has stated. *"These are not poems, but could be made into ones; these are not stories, but could be made into ones"*. The poems, according to the well known poetry critic, Bala, were romantic love songs endowed with lyrical elegance and narrative strength. The book made history in sales and the number of reprints has exceeded ten something unusual for any poetry collection in Tamil.

*"Kanavukal"* contained fine pieces of dramatic poetry which dwelled upon the yearnings of a youth who could not get the favours of approval from his beloved, and in some places it seemed to be a case of one sided love. The poems were passionate, and all through the collection the persona is shown to be a very humane person of gentle feelings and true passions. The success of this collection was phenomenal. A Meera School of Love Lyricists emerged on the scene. Almost a hundred collections on the model of *Kanavukal* appeared during the seventies and eighties. While all those attempts were different kind of failures, Meera's creativity was so inimitable and superb that he remained on top. He was simple, direct, and powerful as in this piece:

*Tell me now, yes or no*
*I've within my powers*
*To take any answer of yours.*
*Tell me now, yes or no*
*I've another waiting for me now;*
*I have to go to her*
*Only after I know your mind, dear.*

*She waits for me over there*
*At the outskirts of this village all eager*
*She is making a beautiful room*
*With blocks of stone for my sake*
*Her name, would you like to now?*
*It is Death.*

Of course the poet asserts that death cannot be the end for love. Bharthidasan in his famous poem *Puratci Kavi,* deals with love as a central force that could usher in a revolution, dismantling the prevalent monarchy, paving for democracy. The hero and heroine of *Puratci Kavi,* Utaran, the poet, and Amuthavalli, the princess are able to achieve through their love for each other, the much needed social transformation. Meera too, very

much like Bharathidasan, dwells on the theme of revolution as he speaks of passions of love. In a poem the lover says,

*Look, my youth has lost its sustenance*
*Ravaged like the working class*
*Exploited by capitalism*
*Look at my life burnt like a*
*Farm labour hand caught by the damned hands of feudals.*
........

Another dimension of Meera's poetry is his gift for satire and irony. Tamil New Poetry acquired its greatest strength when it was able to incorporate the elements of satire and irony, especially in poems that have a contemporary social meaning. Meera is a fine verbal artist and he could weave his pen with the skill of a great master when he dwelled on political and social themes. His poetry collection, *Oosikal,* (Needles) published in 1974 made history again. It was also, like *Kanuvakal,* a best seller. The poems were quoted in public speeches by politicians and writers; the pieces were included in anthologies, and translated into many languages. English poet John Dryden when he wrote political satire, made direct reference to the characters he censured. But Meera has done it very subtly, he makes his characters imaginary, but they emerge as social types. Meera's poems are powerful satires on politics, society, living style, education, administration, and also on values. In the history of modern Tamil Poetry Meera's *Oosikal* is unique and great. "Speed" is a good example for Meera's simple but powerful art for satire:

*Our local M.L.A. has*
*Changed party*
*Eight times in*
*Seven months*
*With the speed of lightning*

*Were there 70 parties*
*He would have shown*
*His true mettle*
*This our nation*
*What a nation!*

***(Tr. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar)***

Many of Meera's satirical poems have an apparent simplicity but the current political and social scenario provide them an unusual and pungent strength.

Meera's creative ventures have been quite solid, and he continues to write in magazines, small and big, and his third collection, according to Bala who is presently authoring a monograph in English on him, is a collection of haikesque pieces due for publication shortly.

Meera has another facet of contribution which has gone into the pages of 20th century Tamil literature : he was the founder of two publishing houses – Akaram and Annam, which could be compared to publishing houses like Pelican and Penguin. Most of the contemporary writers in Tamil have enjoyed the favour of Annam and Akaram in their first publications, Through these two publshing houses, Meera exercised a great influence in shaping the growth of Tamil poetry, fiction and criticism. hence he is rightly considered an institution by himself.

Meera also floated and edited many little magazines devoted to modern writings, which included *Kavi, Annam,* and *Annam Vidu Thoothu.*

For the benefit of the readers of this book, I am pleased to give a selection of Meera's poems in English translation, rendered by different well known translators.

■ **Dr. P. Subas Chandrabose**

## From *Oosikal*

### Poverty, Quit

For eight long months
Our leader
At public meetings
Cried hoarse.
Did poverty quit?

Yesterday
In the marriage feast
At Chettiar's house
Our leader
Didn't utter a single word
But only gave a kick
And poverty fled-
With unkempt hair,
Skin and bone
And tattered rags.

*(Tr. M.S. Ramaswamy)*

### Scratcher

I opened my eyes...

A cockroach nibbling my finger
Withdrew

I asked in shock;
"Damned insect
Couldn't your greedy eyes
See the bulgy thumb?

Must you scratch the poor emaciated
Little finger?"

*(Tr. Prema Nandakumar)*

### Even in Death

Two corpses lie face to face!
Doctor came
Dissected the bodies
Declared them suicide
Two corpses lie face to face!

After spending his days
As walking corpse
One ended his drama

After counting his coins
As a shop worn corpse
Another finished his tale

Two corpses lie face to face!

One, Poochi
Unable to eke out a living
Even as a porter
Drank bugsolin and lapsed into cold
Cold for ever

Another
The diamond merchant Mannarsamy
Swallowed powdered diamond
And was chilled
Chilled for ever
Oh!
Even in death
The great are always great!

***(Tr. Indran)***

## From *Kanavukal*

### 1.

The rain that blesses my courtard
Blesses the same your courtyard

The cuckoo that sings in my garden
Sings the same in your garden

The moonlight that graces my vision;
Graces the same your vision;

Why, Oh why,
The love that entered my heart
Entered not, beloved, your heart.

***(Tr. T.M. Premachandran)***

### 2.

Whenever summer comes,
I desire to wander near the snowy lands
Like an Eskimo!

Whenever winter comes,
I desire to stand near fire
Like a train-driver!

But now
In all the seasons
I Desire to be near your person!

***(Tr. T.M. Premachandran)***

## 3.

They say
Like a teacher who fell in love with his own student
Like a saint who fell in love with his own devotee
I am fallen

It is a great fall
In the eyes of the people of this town
Who thought of me as Everest
Yet it is inevitable! it is natural!
We can dam a river
How can we stop the falls?
O!
My fall is a cascade!

***(Tr. K. Stalin)***

## 4.

One of my friends, a literary critic
Once inquired me:
"Is human love a lie or truth?"

O, my goodness!
I met you at the right time.

If not,
I would have replied wrong!

***(Tr. K. Stalin)***

## 5.

Newton discovered
The gravitation of the earth.

I have discovered
The gravitation of my soul

O my discovery!
I hail you.

*(Tr. K. Stalin)*

## Meera's *Haikus*

In the city of Koodal*
crowds
crowds crowds
crowds crowds crowds
All out to have a look at
the crowd.



I had a dream.
In that dream
I saw myself
Sleeping so well.



A veena was lying
Idle in the woods.
A wood-cutter chanced upon it;
And it was burnt at his house.



On the top of the hill
A tree in penance
Seeks a boon
To stand along the avenue.



Up above
Stands the flowerstall.
Down below
Stinks the gutter.



Oh, maids who sell
New blossoms
Near the police station!
Oh, maids,

Who made thee
With faces of
Withered flowers?



Fish eats dirt
Crane eats the fish
Man eats the crane
Hunger eats the man.



The huts of the poor
were on fire
Torched by someone.
In the rising smoke
Could be seen
Some bungalows.



Metropolis is metropolis!
Could you see
Life-size posters
one at least
in this villagle of huts?



This summer
The tap poured forth water
In full.
I looked round, stripped
and threw myself
into the tub.



Right opposite this graveyard
My house is built.
Easy to bid farewell
Any time with ease.

* 'Koodal' is another name for Madurai and means a city where people converge.

Source : Meera Kavidhaigal (Akaram Sivagangai)

*(Tr. Bala)*

# Tharmuh Shivaramuh
## (1939 - 1997)

A. Ramasamy

**Dr. A. Ramasamy**

well known in Modern Literature circles as a theatre person, and critic. Presently he is Reader in the Department of Tamil, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Thirunelveli.

# Tharmuh Shivaramuh

Anyone who wants to talk about the so-called Tamil Poet Tharmu Shivaramuh and his poems will be confounded by his pen names and the multidimensional quality of his poems alike. Pramil, as he is generally known, has other names like Dharmu Sivaram, Dharmoo Aroob Sivaram, Dharmo Shivram, Pramil Banuchandran, Ajithran Piramil, D. etc. Still, these names do not have any direct connections with the names, he has acquired through his poems such as "Imagist Poet", "Spiritual Poet", and "Philosophic Poet". Pramil, with his involvement and knowledge of philosophy and spirituality, had also faith and knowledge in astrology and predictive astrology. Perhaps this was the reason why he lived as a poet with his ever-changing names.

Out of his life span of 58 years, he had a poetic career of four decades. Though his first poem "Naan" (I) (1960) was published in "*Ezhuthu*", a number of his other poems were left in Sri Lanka, unpublished. Born in Trincomalee in Sri Lanka, Pramil came to Tamil Nadu in the early seventies. He established his personality in various fields like drama, short story, criticism and also in painting and pottery. Above all, his personality got culminated as a modern poet. At times, he has written poems in English and he himself has translated his Tamil poems into English. His poems were published posthumously under the title "Pramil Poems" (1988) by his friend and scholar, Kalasubramanian.

Bharathi emerged as a modern poet in the early 20th century. Later, Bharathidasan and his followers set a tradition of their own. Going against this, a modern poetic movement "Puthukavithai Iyakkam" emerged in various forms. One of its branch is "*Ezhuthu*" poetry of insight, innovated by Pitchamoorthy. We can classify "*Vanambadi* Poems" as yet another branch which denies the inwardness (subjectivity) and insists on the

conversational style. Though his early poems were mostly published in C.Ṣu. Chellappa's journal "*Ezhuthu*", they have a unique quality which make them distinct from the writings of the so-called "*Ezhuthu*" writers like Ku.Pa. Rajagopalan, Ka.Na.Su., T.S. Venugopalan, S. Vaideeswaran, Nakulan, Pasuvayya, C. Mani and others. Issues which the "*Ezhuthu*" poets considered worth discussing can be listed as follows: (i) vedantic and philosophic problems; (ii) lack of faith; (iii) denial of life; (iv) quest. All these make the modern poetic form as an expression of the self. Such qualities are predominant in the poems of his initial phase. This is evident in his first poem "Naan" and his other poems like "Irumai", "Chaithrian", "Visaram", "Kadavu", "Palaimai", "Edu", "Kelvigal", etc. His poetic form and his daring ability to venture in to matters that the other poets hesitate to deal with, are the distinguishing features of Pramil.

Not only his poems reveal spontaneity of powerful feelings but exhibit an economy of language. Critics quote his poems as examples of tension, abundance and compactness. Sexual hunger, religious identity of saivites, poems on J. Krishnamoorthy's philosophy, poems on the theory of art and literature - all these thematic spectrum of Pramil, distinguish him from fellow *Ezhuthu* poets. When we talk about Pramil's sexual poems, we have to start from Sangam "Akam" tradition. Andal's poetry defied this tradition of expressing sexual feelings in a self-revealing tone. Sexual figures were rather explicit in "Parani" and "Ula" poems of the middle ages. Pramil's poetics is at once a blend of the romantic western expression and the native "Akam" tradition, and his sexual figures are powerful and new.

Pramil has employed Indian / Tamil myth in his poems. At the same time, he has handled efficiently, the European myths: Kannagi, Mohini, Akalya, Soorpanagai, Kooni, etc. and characters like Thirisangu, Prahalad, Iraniya, Arjuna, Indra, Gauthama, Rama, Krishna have got a modern treatment. His depiction of the male symbol "Shiva" in a simple, easy style in his popular collection "Mel Nokkia Payanam" (Journey Upwards) deserves mention here.

He has deep involvement in the philosophy of J. Krishnamoorthy. He has translated and published some of J.K.'s poems under the title "Valvu Pattu". Pramil, inspite of being a modern poet, was critical of subjective and political school of poetry. Hence his friends and admirers say that he is a non-conformist. Critical hostility and public apathy had a profound impact on Pramil. The bitter strain found in his critical essays

may be the reason for the complaints against him. His vehement criticism was found not only in his essays but also in his poems.

He also wrote satirical verses on his contemporaries like Venkat Swaminathan, Brahma Rajan, Sundara Ramasamy, N. Muthusamy, Gnanakoothan, Nakulan, and Ka.Na. Subramanian. We can't ignore them as mere satires but we should consider the depth of reality found in them. Though, he has vehemently criticized other poets, his views on poetry and art are worthy consideration. He is keen in making his readers feel his poetry. He insisted on the subjective aspect of poetry.

One may identify the dimensions of Pramil's poetry with the translations of a few poems. The readers should be aware that this is not enough to understand Pramil's dimensions, in its fullest form.

Ula - a genre of literature in which the women of the town are said to fall in love with the hero when he goes in procession along the streets with his troupe.

Parani - a poem about a hero who destroyed a thousands elephants.

■ **A. Ramasamy**

## Reference

Pramil Kavithaikal (Poems of Pramil), Serymaglam: Layam Veliyeedu, 1988. Collected by Kala Subramanian.

### 1. The Door

The moth knocks open
The flame
Into the abyss

### 2. Epic

A feather detaching itself
From the winds
Reads on the
Pages of the wind
The life of the bird

### 3. The Desert

This vast stretch of sand
Golden in all directions
Is a soothing view, but
Burning under foot
And ever on the move
Is a fistfull of desert
In search of a shade

### 4. Paradox

The wave whisper
To the deaf sand line
The eye travels with the wind
Only to be blinded by
The wind - borne dust
Within the eye of fire
The ash is closed eyelid.

***( Tr. by the poet)***

### Virgin ("Kanni")

A hundred shadows of scythes
fly during the harvest
As one human shadow tramples on it
It submits and with saved head,
Lies low on the ground
As the harvest ends and people leave
It rises its head slowly
Single and shy, a plant

With uncut grains on head
Stands amidst their shreds of shadows.

Today's shadow will pass
Tomorrow will dawn for you too
The coy veil will be shed;
Life will ripe,
Your husky hair you will lose
A white face will burst out,
A seedy atom's public appearance.

***(Tr. Bala)***

## Soorpanagai whom Rama Lost

In the dark coloured cheeks
red hot coals smiled
Her gigantic rocks melted
So what? He is God.

Within the night of her dress
darkness of youth
dying for a dawn.

In her steps, each and every steps,
Trembled flames of flesh
So what? Alas, he is God.

The thighs dying for an embrace
Burstingly fall apart;
From inside an inverted
black flame burn
and burn and make a call
So what? He is God.

***(Tr. Bala)***

## E = MC²

The sun, a blind orb,
Groping in dry space
with sticks of rays
Goes on and on
"Destination?"
Asked the pupils.

93 million miles off
And out of a Himalayan bump

On an earth - drop
Lord Siva gave voice
"Here!"
Touching his chest, gone bony,
For,
The priest had been stealing
Food offered to the Lord.

"Dummy!" laughed the pupils
His fingertips guided by a child
Einstein's piano levitates
And is all space
Upon the table is
The cryptic river of Mathematics
Upon the sandy banks of thought
Totters a tree, the old universe.

The waters swell;
Space and Time comingle
Into a shadow - river
Now it is a Universe all new
In the apparent reality
That comes of the sluggish
Speed of light
The stellar orbs that blew off
In a yester - age centuries gone
Still are,
Space is time
What was
Is;
What is
will be.

This massive current,
This new universe, not held
Within the banks of the present,
Goes on in a different dimension
The search that was
Space among stars
Folds up
The atom is
Universe folded up
And every particle is
Vibrant energy
Mass.

Into
The velocity of light squared
A theory demonstrated
In a desert in Mexico
1945
Hiroshima, Nagasaki
Matter is energy
Eyeless
Copies of the Sun
Momentary shadows
Leaping to the horizon
With triumphant chuckless
The chuckling skulls
In the garland of the famished
And expiring Lord Siva.

Musical space withdrawn
The piano is matter
Its galactic keyboard lies desolate
Somewhere in the world,
In its crude night,
A child is crying,
And the sun
Reflects on Einstein's tears:
The instant of vision.

***(Tr. by the poet)***

## Cobra – Hymn

The sun-god in his elliptical wisdom
Pulls his chariot into a too-real cusp
Too near, knowing the earth's thirst
For fire, damned to creep in dust
And confused by quadruped foot-falls,
The serpent reacts, the sun now
A great fiery grain atop is raised hood.

From this upright archetype
The first one who is firm on all fours
Takes the first great intellectual leap
Of rising into bipedal vulnerability
And stands on his hind-legs
An equal to the great sun-snake
The nightly wake of the celestial creeper
Is full of stars, contained in a limitless shade.

The first one reached out towards nothing
And finds the fifth lifeless finger
Removing itself from the earthy four,
Like the sun-snake, rising,
Opposing, dominant and unlike
The others, giving perfect grip
Around throats and clubs,
Rendering a circle around
The goodness of breasts and cups.

The first one relaxes, the harvest over
The fields turn to their barren phase
There is a great serpent over the land
Atop his hood a relentless grain of fire.
Trampled by a workman
A single stalk poor in yield.
Escapes the First one's
One-hundred-and-eight-scythes
Trembling, it raises a lone grain to the sun
Like the tiny hood of a Cobra.

***(Tr. by the poet)***

# Mu. Metha
## (b. 1945)

K. Ramachandran

**Prof. K. Ramachandran**

poet, essayist, and a critic. He has authored a monograph on Mu. Metha, and also a book of criticism on the poet and his social vision. Ramachandran is a professor of Tamil and teaches in S.R. Naidu Memorial College, Sattur.

# Mu. Metha

The history of Tamil New Poetry cannot be written without dwelling upon *Vanambadi* Movement, and any note on *Vanambadi* movement will not be complete without the mention of the name Mu. Metha. Metha, the now well known new poet, like many poets of our days, was wrought by the influence Bharathi and Bharathidasan. But he was able to transcend the influence and carve out a name for himself in the world of Tamil New Poetry.

Metha is a stylist. He is also a poet of conviction. His greatness lies in his inimitable style and his commitment to ideals. For him poetry is not just an exercise in verbal art; it is also a powerful weapon for the creation of new social order. It is not an expression of mind; it is also a force that integrates people into a movement. Naturally, his poetics is disciplined by these demands.

During his young days, he was gravitated to Dravidian and Tamil Nationalist Movements, and during the days of Vanambadi, he blossomed into a poet of socialist dreams and international perspective. He says:

> "I began to write poetry impelled by love for Tamil and equally by romantic passions for a beloved. Later, I was caught by protest and anger against social inequalities. This made me wear a 'tilak' of blood on my forehead, which in due course slowly transformed into a third eye".

Metha was a follower of traditionalist school during the initial days of his poetic career; it was his social consciousness that took him to the world of New Poetry. When New Poets received flakes from traditionalists, he argued that the shackles of grammar could not hold poets who are wedded to freedom and democracy. Hence he defined New Poetry thus:

*Sceptre of Grammar*
*Throne of Prosody*
*Convoys of Purists*
*Processions of Pundits*
*Without any of these –*
*When in true democratic spirit*
*Ideas learn to rule themselves*
*You have New Poetry*

***(Tr. Bala)***

Metha was born on 5th September 1945 in Periakulam, a small town in Madurai District. He went to Madurai for his higher studies, and was graduated from Thiagarajar College, Madurai, which is the alma mater of many well known politicians and poets of today. Metha is now a Professor of Tamil in Presidency College, Chennai.

Metha's career reveals a many faceted personality. He has tried his hands with success in the field of poetry, fiction, film lyrics and performance poetry. He enjoys a large audience and according to his publishers, his books top the sales, next only to Kannadasan.

When Metha's first collection, *Kanneer Pookal* (1974) was published, it took the poetry world by storm. The book contained poems of social concern and very passionate lyrics on love. The poems attracted a large audience, and we can say, they created an audience for consumption of New Poetry in general. With more than 20 reprints, the book continues to be popular. Metha is a prolific writer, and has now to his credit, 18 volumes of poems, an epic on Prophet Muhammad, two collection of short stories, two novels, five volumes of essays, two books of interviews, a volume of film lyrics, apart from several articles in magazines yet to be collected.

Metha is a natural poet and is not given to play tricks of experimentations to retain an audience. His poem in the first issue of *Vanambadi* begins thus:

*"O, my comrades*
*Who among you*
*Shall sing the*
*Incomparable song of Humanism*
*When the work of hands*
*Is slighted*

*We can't but choose*
*Red among the colours*
*Yes, we are the red birds*
*Floating in the dark sky".*

*(Tr. Bala)*

According to the well known poetry critic Bala, "Metha speaks in a simple but powerful language. He has a gift for fine turns of expression that spread a magical charm over his readers". His social poems as well as romantic lyrics exercise a tremendous influence on poetry audience. A selection of translations included here, I am sure, will affirm this.

■ **K. Ramachandran**

## Theatre of Romance

### Love

It is a strange net
People who spread it
Are themselves caught up there!

### Love

It is a drama staged
When two eyes take two more eyes
When all the four got blindfolded!

### Lover's passage

Virgin flowers dreamt of decorating
A wedding house
But fell onto a coffin box!

### My first love

A letter with incorrect address
Knocked many a door
And reached me safe finally

### Even the postman is kind to me

Even the postman is kind to me
He grants me joy sometimes
When he delivers mails
Though some of them are not addressed to me
But you alone are unkind
You are yet to pen a letter of love
One long due by now.

### Even if you don't write you love me

Please do write to me
Even if you don't write you love me
At least write to me to state
You don't love any one else.

### She is the paradise

I made frantic inquiries
About paradise

Not knowing
She is indeed the paradise

## Even my wrist watch stops

Whenever I meet her
Even my wrist watch stops ticking
My heart strikes additional beats
To compensate the loss

## Oh, you are quiet

Of course I may be the first
To start a quarrel
But they invariably end in peace
But you always remain quiet
That by itself is beginning a quarrel

## Your eyes are knife sharp

Oh, your eyes are knife-sharp
I said one day
I didn't know
My heart was the stone
For sharpening them

## Until your lips uttered it

Until your lips uttered it
I never knew
I had a sweet name

## Even gods are wrought in stone

Even merciful gods are wrought in stone
But I rendered my free flowing poems
Solidly in your forms

## You love not me but my poems

I know it well
That you love not me
But love only my poems

Do you know
You are loved
Not by my poems
But by me.

*(Tr. Bala)*

## India and Myself

We are good friends,
India and I.

India has in her hands
An ancient history;
I have in my hands
Age-old poverty.

We are good friends,
India and I.

We made a movie
In black and white
With Gandhi as hero
The distributors made hefty profit
Only the producers languish in hunger.

We launched a dance show
On auspicious day;
People danced there in ecstasy
Only we got stoned!

I am always concerned with India
Only India has no concern for me!

We staged a drama
All across the nation
Socialism was its title
Only the last scene
– Characters sharing their hunger equally –
Received the most applause.

We remain as we are
India and me;

We are good friends,
India and I.

India has in her hands
An ancient history;
I have in my hands
Age-old poverty.

We are good friends,
India and I.

*(Tr. Bala)*

## A Street Poet's Homage to the Father of the Nation*

Your portraits are taken in processions
Why do you stand in street squares head down?

On this auspicious day
As we attempt to add colour to the faded nation
Your lament for the sons and daughters of this land fall on my ears.

O, Father of the Nation,
Whenever I cast my eyes on your statues
– It is an abode of peace –
I break down and in the heat of my tears
My poems end abruptly.

The lines that make the map of India
Are not just lines
They are bones of the martyrs who died for the freedom of India
We pay homage to them this moment
Through this very monument – India.

Father, you left us
Placing in our hands
*Amuda Surabhi,* the vessel of all boons
But
What remains in our hands today is a begging bowl!

Who wrought this magic?
Who were those magicians?
Who'll expose the dark shadows within shadows?

The pages of royal history
Unable to stand the dazzling light of Ahimsa
Blacked out Bhagat Singh and many more
Hence perhaps today
Rats rattle the mansion of freedom.

An ancient chieftain of this land
Threw a shawl over a peafowl shivering in wintry cold
We hail him as a great benefactor
The inheritors of his illustrious tradition today
Steal even the tattered shirts on us!

Father, you lived on goat's milk
Hence we reared goats for you!
But in due course we ourselves have become cattle

Our shepherds neglect our stomachs
And care only for our teats
We don't get any fodder
So what?
Our shepherds get their wages anyhow.

I break down and in the heat of my tears
My poems end abruptly.

Big holes threaten the court halls
Pillars of Dharma have become old
They threaten to fall down any moment
Our life has become a tryst with darkness

Sins are committed here individually
Penance sought collectively
O we have enough holy shrines for this

Hence the sons of Bharat are clean, spick and span
With no dust on them.

Crowns of laurels are worn
In the royal mansions on this nation
In the eyes of slum children well up only tears

Some who have spun khadi in the past
Rotating the weapon you discovered, chakra
Are now weaving threads of gold, they say
For us silver and gold come only in the names of festivals

In one respect people of this land follow you dutifully
They too dress half-naked!
As the nation marches ahead it seems
Our birth day dress will become our national dress!

Our leaders are determined
To banish poverty somehow
For this
They do penance before the mikes.

Who said the nation has witnessed no change?
O, Aputhira, you placed in our hands only *Amuda Surabhi* –
The vessel of all boons
But what remains today in our hands
Is only a begging bowl

The waters running from the dams
Flow uplands dodging the slopes

They know well
You love the people in the slums
And hence they have transformed the entire nation
Into a slum!

We garland the necks of the men
Who wrought this magic!

Your portraits are taken in processions
Why do you stand in street squares head down?

On this auspicious day
As we attempt to add colour to the faded nation
Your lament for the sons and daughters of this land fall on my ears.

O, Father of the Nation,
Whenever I cast my eyes on your statues
– It is an abode of peace –
I break down and in the heat of my tears
My poems end abruptly.

***(Tr. Bala)***

# Bala
## (b. 1946)

S. Suresh Kumar

**Dr. S. Suresh Kumar**

a comparatist and translator, teaches English in Pioneer Kumarasamy College, Nagercoil. He has already issued a full length book of Bala's poems in English translation.

# Bala

Bala is a familiar figure in the world of Tamil contemporary poetry and is known as a poet of new expression and sensitive temperament. At his best, Bala could make unfamiliar figures strangely fascinating, bring a lovely maiden before us in the flesh as in "Adornment" or tease us out of thought with his fresh insight into men and matters as in "Century of Smiles" or "Your Merriments". He could reverse with comic effect the theory of evolution in "Worms and Poets", portray with pathos the plight of Vallimuthu or pen for a pal different lines in "Autograph".

At fifty-three, he is at the pinnancle of his poetic powers. Poetry, like life, is a universal expression without boundaries. The poetic art enables him to roam in the realms of reality and fantasy without limits. He writes how he loves to live unbounded by boundaries in "Human Destiny": *"To live midway do I desire, push me not aside:"*

Bala, like Bharathi, aspires to write poetry with new words, new meanings, new messages and new music. But while Bharathi glorifies all that makes the Indian heritage rich and meaningful, Bala tends to subvert tradition and subtly satirise the sacred with a sardonic smile as in "Woods of Woe". The poet could never resist the desire to utter his feelings when he is transported. He would speak even if no one listened to him like the cuckoo in his poem "Cuckoos Never Cease to Sing", because his feelings would not let him be silent. "Pyols and Drawing - rooms" shows that the poet is nostalgic for the good old times that saw the springs of human goodness, hospitality and vitality. In his pleasantly variegated verses of poetic prose he attains the precision, the brilliance, brevity and the beauty of images that one looks for in ultra modern poetry. His poems present him as one who is quite alive to the social, political and cultural pressures of life in modern India.

In his book, "Stalin's Plays and other Essays on Contemporary Tamil Literature", Bala says that modern Tamil poetry sacrifices "metre and rhyme and other rules of versification so as to suit the new themes of social and psychic reality" and adopts the language of satire and irony. He was a member of the school of writers known as "Vanambadi Poets" of the seventies. The writers of this group aimed to realign "the language of poetry to the needs of their ideals," as he writes. These poets freely use symbols and images drawn from myths, legends and life around them. Bala, for instance, has a poem entitled "Mourning" where one finds a cluster of images. Another poem of imagistic strength is "A Chest of Images". Vanambadi poets resort to the use of irony as Bala does in "Papery Rain," as they deal with current societal issues.

Bala could be described as a romantic realist or revolutionary romantic. Lovely romantic pieces could be found in his collection like the one entitled "Where are my Poems", in which he flees the prosaic reality of workaday world to find fulfilment in the poetic realm of romance. His poems are, to quote his own words, "rhythmic free verses" and not "disruptive" compositions. They are sometimes "impressionistic respresentations" like the "Withered Tree," or "dreamy fantasies" like the people in "Humans of the Future". Some of his poems seem to be rooted in sweet memories of the poet's youth. There are pieces that communicate sensual sensations as well. But satire seems to be his favourite tool of art.

Bala is not only a poet and professor but a translator, critic and orator as well. He was born in Sivaganga on 24th December, 1946. He read for his graduation at Alagappa College, Karaikudi and obtained his Master's Degree in English at Sri Venkateswara University in Tirupati. He taught in Government colleges before he moved to in M.S. University, Tirunelveli in 1993, Bala has also made his mark as a teacher, researcher, translator, speaker, broadcaster, and critic of uncanny acuity.

His early poems appeared in "Deepam" and "Vanambadi" and were included in many anthologies. His most recent work is the much celebrated poetry correction, 'Thinnaikalum and Varaverparaikalum (1999)'. The poems provided here in translation and his other critical and creative works prove that he is one who tries to make a revolution in the taste of his generation. What he has to tell literary aspirants is this, "Do not write for fame or fortune. Write only to tap the springs of creativity. Write only if you have something new to break and ideas to share with the reader".

Bala belives in the subtle gifts of Tamil tradition which are available only to the most sensitive minds. He is a modernist in his own unique way, diferent from those influenced by Anglo-Amercian modernism.

■ **S. Suresh Kumar**

## Reference:

*Innoru Manitharkal.* Sivagangai: Annam, 1991
*Thinnaikalum Varaverparaikalum.* Chennai, Kavitha Pathippakam, 1999.

## Help

Lent I to the eyeless one
a hand to cross the road;
    On my visage Divinity
    an ocular drawing did.

To help the armless one board a bus
lent I my arms;
    On my trunk Divinity
    a manual drawing did.

To help the legless one sit on a pushcart
lent I a hand;
    On my flesh Divinity
    did a drawing of legs.

To the lost wayfarer
showed I the way;
    For my form
    Divinity granted life.

To the one eaten by hunger
gave I a drink;
    For my life Divinity
    this world provided.

How obtained a life
through manifold deeds
said I,
    Lost I then all.

## Woods of Woe

Waits Sita
wondering whether the king will come;

Redeem with ripeness
could the loser
that lost her midway?

Dismayed waits Sita
wondering whether her man will come

Can the hero cross the sea who
to cross even a little rivulet
relied on the goodwill
of the great Guha

wonders Sita and wants to know
whether the king will come.

No ordinary man is he
who on losing the crown
stood with a sovereign smile.
Would he on losing his spouse
part with a smile of sacrifice
or distressed would he here direct his steps,
wonders Sita and wants to know
whether the king will come.

Not knowing how the morrow would turn out
lost in anxieties and uncertain turmoil
Waits Sita
wondering whether the king will come.

## Classmate

Vallimuthu was m_ classmate. Of him
could I help penning a line?

All through class hours
ogling girls he would sit

Out of class hours even
he would talk only of women.
Even in hours of slumber at home
women would flash in his dreams, he would say.

Women too adored him.

Vallimuthu his studies finished.
For a typist's post he for an interview
appeared and got back;
'Nirmala got the job' he said

For an office assistant's post
with a thousand recommendations he did attend;
'Annapackiam got the job'
later he came and to me said.

As he ran after a receptionist's job
'Vatsala was there' said he
He was fed up with life

He would talk only of women even then
Only women lacked then
love for him

In the daily carrying
the news of thirty-three percent jobs for women
came the news of his death.

Vallimuthu was my classmate. Of him
could I help penning a line?

## Cuckoos Never Cease to Sing

This is no realm for cuckoos.
Yet cuckoos never cease to sing.

Perching on the prominent slope of the wall
Carrying the colourful poster of the pubescence festival
sang the cuckoo one morning.
Seeing that the men with eyes there
have no ears sadly soared the bird.

On the bough of the bending tamarind tree
that stood by the road with its belly painted white
sat and sang the cuckoo in the noontide
In its shade began to sing the forutne-teller
of the fortune that the unfortunate parrot
told for a grain of corn
as it picked out the card telling it

In the captivation of the commercial song
the cuckoo's went unheard;
it flew in fury
that even the sad song for the parrots
went unheeded.

Sitting softly like a flower
on the bough of a blossoming tree that stood stroking the window
sang the cuckoo seeing near by
a pair of young lovers in their home
lost in love.
The lovers lay with their minds melting
    in the song sung by a false cuckoo
    that floated from inside a cupboard
    on the track of a cassette.
The melody that arose from the cuckoo
with the warmth of the flesh
did not fall on the ears of the fallen lovers.

Still goes on the song of the cuckoo
dipping its voice,
in the smoke of the hooting train
at dawn from day to day
for me alone.

This is no realm for cuckoos.
Yet would the cuckoo cease to sing?

## Pyols and Drawing-rooms

Lanes with houses
once in their fullness lay

before the emergence of
houses with faces lost
narrowing bending
between shops
thinning with
no doorway left for floor drawings
losing the head and
bending on the tail
rising to life to respond
only to the sound of an electric bell
or the call of the mailman

Lanes with houses
once in their fullness lay

Once houses
had pyols

before the emergence of
compound walls-
hung with the sign-
"Beware of Dogs"

The houses of old
where civilization abode
had pyols.

On either side
the low-lying lane
swelling and spreading
rich with reclining mounds
pyols did lie.

Today pulling down pyols
drawing-rooms have been put up
For the sake of perfection
pleasing colours for the walls
adding to the attraction
coloured drawings
For sitting in comfort
wide wide soft seats

To place drinks and papers
glossy tea-tables

To drive tiredness away
twinkling tele-sets

To place the feet
Comfortable carpets

To call out
electric bells

To display the artistic sense
lovely dolls
in glass cases

To curb the heat
curtains in the windows

To slake the thirst
refrigerators

Everything there is
in the drawing-rooms;

Is humanity found there?

Could in these drawing-rooms
a wayfarer
from the fatigue of walking
sit comfortably?

Could in these drawing-rooms
a distant traveller
a pot of buttermilk
or a drink of water get
and enjoy it generously?

Could in these drawing-rooms
a grandpa or grandma
ripened in life

seat
an unknown person
for a town chat
or to talk idly of the house?

On those pyols
a heaven there was
in those days!

Since soaked in love
even the dust on the pyol
used to be golden
in those days!

To sit or lie down
to chat with others
and so on
on those pyols
humanity there generally
used to be!

"All are my kindred"
Even its author
on a pyol
sitting must have penned it.

In our topsy-turvy culture
pulling down pyols
and putting up drawing-rooms
life a decoration has turned.

Only the face of humanity is left unadorned!

## A Chest of Images

She bowed her head
and dired her hair.
    In the chest of images
    the sun its rays
    showering he saw

She brought together her hair
and braided it.
    He in the chest of images
    saw black clouds
    rolling into each other.

Looking in the mirror she
wore a flower
He in the chest of images
saw a moon placed
in the sky.
She turning towards him
with lustre in her eyes
did smile
Before smiling back
with all his heart
into the chest of images
headlong he fell!

## Where are My Poems?

Where are my poems?
Only here on the table
till now they were.
What? Seek them out anyway
on the bed?
by the staircase?
on the peg?
In the pocket of my bag?
between the folds of the books in the bag
kept by the children?
Search, search with care
in your kitchen cupboard.
In the old trunk
crammed with clothes
Inside the plastic cover of the Ration Card?
On the TV stand, or else beneath?
Nowhere to be seen.
What's found
when sought right away?
Slamming the door
I hurried out into the street.
Out in the shade of the dew-flower tree
by the fallen flowers
lying like a pipe of music
gently smiling and in a honeyed tone
greeted me my poems
All have assumed her appearance.

## Withered Tree

'One child enough'
said the sign of an ad
on a withered tree. On its
bough winked
a tender shoot.
Like an aged woman with a foetus
pitifully stood the tree.

## Humans of the Future

With dewy petals and a coral stem
flew high the flowers of fancy
Delightfully stroking the petals
peeped the bird of wisdom
In the world of wonders viewed inside
saw she appearing humans of the future.

Hands they had
shaped like shallow spoons

Legs they had
fashioned round like wheels
Eyes they had
like needle points with caps

The heart too saw she
one within and one without!

Male-female equality there
existed in physical form. But

strange, none knew to stand!
moving like chairs
went about humans
No houses anywhere; nor frontiers of countries.
in mobile boxes
carried they on.

Roads vehicles jungles
none anywhere there
There stood a few trees
in the sunlight pooled in a pot of glass.

Models of animals and birds
were animated by machines
in a place like a playground.

In place of letters were seen numbers everywhere
as light had replaced speech

Hung on the faces of humans
in the form of parasols the traces of ears.

The belly alone remained
big for all.
Luckily, escaped man
thus sang the bird of wisdom.

*(All poems Tr. S. Sureshkumar)*

# Vairamuthu
## (b. 1950)

Indran

**Indran**

poet, translator and a well known art critic. He writes in English and Tamil and has many books to his credit.

# Vairamuthu

Vairamuthu the poet hailing from Vadugapatti village in Tamilnadu, is quite successful in blending the richness of a classical language with contemporary life with particular reference to rural experience. In many of his poems the reader can feel the fragrance of plough, lands, and paddy fields, a strong love for native nature and a burden of poverty sticken peasant views. He remembers from his early childhood (he was born in 1950) the lullabies and legends, folk tales and beliefs current among the people.

Being a poet who knows the art of verse-making in traditional style as well as the nuances of Tamil language which has been enriched by constant handling by scores of master-poets like Valluvar, Kamban, Ilango and Bharathi, he feels at home with free verse as well. The Dravidian thought that served as a spring-board for Bharathidasan continues to inspire Vairamuthu also. Educated in Pachaiyappa's College, Chennai, he is a post-graduate in Tamil literature from the University of Madras. He has contributed several volumes of works – poems, verses, novels, essays, and biography. In the line of Bharathidasan who represents the beginning of a long tradition in Modern Tamil poetry that ventured to release the language from the one-way-push of the past, Vairamuthu chooses simple words and forms to share his deeper emotions with larger readers.

As the most popular lyricist in Tamil Cinema he has won national award thrice for his extraordinary lyrics.

The poetic expression of Vairamuthu borrows very extensively from the treasure - house of folk-expression. In the galaxy of modern Tamil poets in the tradition of Bharathidasan, Vairamuthu has a place of his own.

Bharathi and Bharathidasan represent the beginning of a long tradition in Modern Tamil poetry that ventured to release the language from the

one-way-push of the past. In the process of relaxing the language from hardening in modern cullture, Vairamuthu, a poet with strong base in classical Tamil literature, started writing poems with transparent and open character.

I would lik• to describe the craft of Vairamuthu's poetry as an act of pulling the cloak of language around himself. His poetry-making is not an act of carving and sculpting a figure wherein a sculpture is being brought out of a wood or stone by chiseling-out the unnecessary portions in a block of wood or a piece of stone. A poem for Vairamuthu is more of an act of speech than of writing. He never believes like Mallarme, the great poet, who said, "Everything in a world exist to end in a book". One cannot find an alienated tone in the poems of Vairamuthu. The general tone of his poetry is full of confidence, brimming with optimism. With the sensibility of the traditional pastoral poetry of Sangam age, the poet is approaching his contempory subjects, right from computer to communal violence, with a style of his own, in the line of Bharathidasan.

Like Bharathidasan who had touched the subtle details of Nature in his collection of poetry called 'Azhagin Sirippu', Vairamuthu in many of his poems proves himself as an ardent admirer of Nature. In a foreword to his recent collection of poems called 'Peiyena Peiyum Mazhai' he writes.

> "Poetry tells us to look at the world with the eye of a child and live in the world with the mind of a sage.
>
> Each and every movement of this world is subject to my wonder.
>
> Nature has made special arrangements for human beings to wonder at her".

In a poem called 'Flair' he says that those who do not have any flair for enjoying the smile of a sleeping baby, wonderful wings of a butterfly, frothy form of an angry river are born only for the purpose of finding a place in electoral rolls.

Goethe, the German philosopher, has said that he who wants to understand a poet should visit his homeland. Vadugapatti, a small village in Madurai, has contributed a lot for the colourful expression of the poet. The oral tradition of his own village has contributed a lot for the idiom of his poetry. As a poet quite aware of the richness of Tamil language, he often rushes to use plenty of words – both classical and colloquial – to create the required effect in his poems.

Vairamuthu's poems are neither coiled springs nor dark caves. In his poems it rarely happens that any one word is more important than another. The word in Vairamuthu opens rather than closes the poem.

As for as Vairamuthu's poems are concerned the words in his poems always exist in the process and are always an utterance of a person in an actual place and time. This person may very well have shown us himself only as he wanted to be seen, if we think of that sort of thing in terms of autobiography, the contents and details of the poems.

We can describe Vairamuthu's poems as tunnels: open to the world at either end. In the process of searching for a new world, which is being born, and discarding a communal and chaotic old world, Vairamuthu is emerging out of the progressive poetic tradition of Bharathidasan, like a fish emerging out of water.

■ **Indran**

**Madurai**

The sound of the hooves
of the Pandian horses,
The chatter from 'silambu' fencing
by fiery youngmen
wordy duels of scholars
and the gentle foot-steps of lovely maidens
mingled together into a medley of music.

This was Madurai, the great city
of evening jasmines.

The streets are long;
temple towers graze the sky
relics of ancient kingdoms
and deep marks of Tamil living
catch the eye.

This is Madurai, ancient city
still young because of
organized life.

Jasmines, wild roses, lotuses
water lilies, Surapunnai,
Mullai, Vahulam and Kurukkathi -
plundering these flowers,
River Vaigai flowed through the city.

This was Madurai,
The city of dancing waters.

The king failed in justice
and expiated it with his death;
The breast that Kannagi wrested away and hurled
burnt down the city.

This is Madurai
afraid of injustice once
but scared today of casteism.

The river Vaigai with ambrosial waters
took an oath:
"I won't mingle with the waters
that swallowed up Tamil"
and stopped flowing into the sea.

This is Madurai, the proud city
which still keeps its heritage.

"The city is a lotus in bloom,
the streets are the petals
and the people, the pollen".
Thus sang the poet of *Paripaadal.*

This is Madurai,
Superior to its northern namesake.

The moustached Pandian kings
The Kalapras, Pallavas, Cholas
and afterwards, aliens greedy for land
(a few good ones among them)
ruled over the city.

This is Madurai,
feministic because of Meenakshi.

Some came to grab the land
Some came to relileve their hunger,
Some came to steal gold;
and some others, to ravage the land.
The city changed them all into her children.

This is Madurai, the city pure
which people worshipped as Mother.

Lime brought from Arabia,
was mixed with sugarcane juice
and a great Mandapa was built -
- like traditional verse -
by Thirumalai.

This is Madurai, city of arts
and headquarters of Tamil poetry.

The graves on the Vaigai bank,
the songs of the cuckoos,
poets who spoke the truth
and dark-skinned warriors
survice as remnants.

This is Madurai, the ancient city
sporting Tamil as her adornment.

Voices from the deliberating halls,
the sound of the temple bells,
sing-song tones of speeches
and the clink of the bangles

sending ripples through the heart
continue to be heard.

This is Madurai the city beautiful.
Full of industries, it never sleeps.

But nowadays, neglecting
industries and factories,
They have developed politics and films
which have produced unemployment,
gossip and idle minds
and plunged the city in violence.

This is Madurai, the city of crossing swords
ravaged during noon.

Drained of its waters, the Vaigai
has become a thin trickle.
Hungry outsiders coming to make a living
Have encroached upon her sands.

This is Madurai which has lost its face
but lives on in wistful memories of the past.

***(Tr. M.L. Thangappa)***

## Jowar Seeds

Man invented agriculture to show that he is different from animals. But most of the Indian farmers have even last the freedom enjoyed by animals. This is a folk song depicting the life of a farmer.

The month of Adi's over
So is Aavani

The deadline fixed by the soothsayer
from Sokkikulam is also over

The land's parched
The aloe's dried
Even the jujube thorns have withered
Shedding their leaves.

Unable to bear the heat
Even the sparrows flown far away
leaving this scorching earth

Not a drop of rain
Dust's not settled
Subsoil's not wet enough to be ploughed

Shedding tears
the plough on the wall laments
will I be fated to plough
or be turned to firewood?

No moisture in the air
No milk in the spurge
Not even two drops
For the ant to wet itself
Clouds haven't come down
No sign of lightning
Darkness not sighted in the west
Nor sign of the westwind

Prayed to all the gods
Prostrated all over
Lying stretched out
A drop of rain on the forehead

Like relatives flocking around a rich man
Clouds returning from their foreign jaunt!

Welcome to Lord Varuna
Put an end to this southern famine.

I have a single plough and a skinny bull
Whom to ask for another bull?
Will search the whole village
If I don't find any
There's always my wife with a broken hip.
Oh prosperous one!
Karuppayi of the lime plastered house
you who can season with water instead of oil
who knows that colour will run
if sent for washing
you thrifty woman who never washed your sari

who lent me
quarter bag of jowar seeds
I promise to return a full bag

The rain's pouring incessantly
Falling in sheets
Lashing incessantly
Thrashing with all its might

Has the rain gone mad?
Tearing the clouds and stitching it with lightning!

The rain that started the day before yesterday
Pouring to the point of choking
Unconscious of the direction
Pouring in sheets.

The roof leaks
the hut's wet
Dampness spreads
Body chills

Flood all around
House, being pulled down
Half the property's getting washed away.

The wind that's ruined the family
Now's lifting the roof
Rain watet's soaking
and dissolving the mud walls.

The land's trembling
Enough of this venomous rain
time for sowing
Bring the sunshine, oh lord!

The rain's stopped
The Sun's shining
I untie the bag
in the corner

The seeds are soaked
Mildew all over
Can't be sown
Sprouted completely!

Is this the fate of the stock that ploughs?
Is farming the livelihood of the cursed?

The earth being parched
Prayed to the Gods
The rains lashed and spoilt everything
Oh Perumal, what to do?

***(Tr. Mallika Krishnaswamy)***

**Stars**

Are these the letters
Of a silent tongue,
That the night comes to write,
On this expansive blackboard blue?

Who is this one
To have put
So many full-stops,
In triumphant joy
Of writing a single - lined epic,
Called "The Moon"?

"Do not pluck these flowers!"
Have these warning letters
On the lunar blackboard
Been blurred,
By the rub of the clouds?

Dont's the dark spots remain,
As dirt indelible,
Despite the deep rubbing off?

The dawn!
Does she on each of her birthday
Blow out all the candles
In a single breath?

Ye stars!
Spruce up your dusty floors!
If not today,
Tomorrow certainly...
Our men
may come up there
For rest!

Note : An impressionistic delineation of the stars in the sky. The star-gazer makes a scientific leap in his forewarning the stars that Man would visit them one day!

***(Tr. R. Ganapathy)***

# Author Index

## J



## K



## M



## N



## P



## R

## S



## T



## W



## Y

An Introduction to

# TAMIL MODERN POETRY



## Authors

- Balachandran R
- Chellappan K
- Indran
- Kalyani P.K
- Prema Nandakumar
- Ramachandran K
- Ramasamy A
- Ravindranathan S
- Sam Sahayam V
- Sankara Narayanan
- Subash Chandra Bose
- Suresh Kumar
- Thothathiri S

## POETS

ABDUL RAHMAN

BALA

BHARATHIDASAN

KALAIGNAR KARUNANIDHI

KANNADASAN

KULOTHUNGAN

MEERA

MU. METHA

NA. PITCHAMOORTHY

PATTUKOTTAI - KALYANASUNDARAM

SIRPI BALASUBRAMANIAM

TAMIZHANBAN

THARMUH SHIVARAMUH

VAIRAMUTHU